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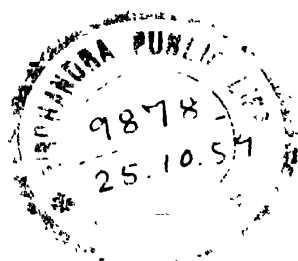
A WREN CALLED SMITH

THE WHITE MEN SANG

THE YELLOW FORD

A novel by

ALEXANDER FULLERTON



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To PRISCILLA
with love

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Any similarity, or apparent connection, between characters in this story and actual persons, whether alive or dead, is purely coincidental.

THE LETTER

IT WAS WRITTEN in Ted Carpenter's own appalling hand, slanting wildly over several sheets of foolscap. It wasn't easy to read.

This is a difficult letter to start, because I know that I've a hell of a nerve to be forcing the business on you. Not the letter, I mean the manuscript which I'm enclosing, and which I want you to read. You'll be the first; nobody else has set eyes on it, up to now.

You'll wonder why I chose you. Well, to start with, you're about as close a friend as I have: this may surprise you, since we had a dust-up years ago, when you disapproved of what I was doing, and later I was damnedly rude to you and to quite a number of other people. I'd like to apologise for that—not for resenting your interference and judgment in that old row: I mean for my boorishness when I came back from up north. I'd like to tell you that I'm sorry for that, now, and have you put it out of your mind, if you will, and read this from the point of view of the plain and uncomplicated friendship we had before it all happened. When you've read the manuscript, I hope you may to some extent understand what I was living with. (That doesn't read as I meant to write it; I was never very good at making apologies. Just believe me that I'm sincere in this one.)

The other reason I've chosen you as the recipient of this very private story is that you're a novelist and will know how to make the thing look readable. You have a publisher, too, and I suppose an agent. I've found it difficult to put it all together

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and make some sort of sense of it: at some places I've had in mind that it could one day be published, and written it as best I can in that way, as if addressing an unknown and unknowing public; at others I've written more personally, rather as if I was talking to you, and I imagine that you'll find these sections need cleaning up. I've never realised before what a difference there is between writing stuff like this (which must read like a novel or a pretty far-fetched pipe-dream) and the sort of travel book which I used to turn out down in the Cape once a year and which you told me once, when I'd thought you'd read them all, that you couldn't read. That annoyed me, at the time!

But this isn't fiction; it's no pipe-dream. You'll believe me, because you have imagination and know that I have none and couldn't possibly have invented it. I can tell you that if you do have it published, there'll be precious few people who'll see it as anything but another of your novels, only a bit more far-fetched (if that's possible) than the rest of them. Well, if that's what they want to think, let them! If you present it to the public, or even to your publisher, as a true story, they'll label you liar or lunatic, or both. I know, you see, because I was in fact regarded as both, when I 'came-to' in the hospital at Mbeya, Tanganyika, with my limbs in plaster, a bandage over my eyes, and my head strapped with wrappings so tight that I'm sure they, rather than the crack in my skull, gave me those awful headaches and moods of depression and anger with the idiots who so obviously disbelieved what I had to tell them.

The doctors, the nurses and the specialist (the brain surgeon) thought I was mental. I don't know if they made any attempt to hide their conclusion from me, but if they did it wasn't a good one. They even had a psychiatrist flown up from Johannesburg, a nervy little man with watery eyes and a weak chin, who asked me questions about my childhood and my parents' temperaments and whether I had always 'dreamed' much. I asked him why he didn't wear glasses when his eyes were so obviously weak, and that made him angry. It occurred

to me that possibly he'd worn them at school and been teased for it by the other boys, but I didn't put this to him because I could see that he already disliked me, and I didn't want to be committed to an asylum.

The policeman (the Assistant Superintendent: A/S.P. Someone they called him) was a decent fellow and I liked him, although it was pretty plain he thought at first that I was lying. What purpose I'd have had in lying, I can't say, because there was nothing in my story that made me particularly proud. In fact, nearly all of it, from my point of view, would be better left untold. Perhaps the policeman thought I had some sort of guilt-complex through having killed the fat man, Lessing; though why he should have credited me with that when all of them actually believed the only lie I'd told them—the bit about it being an accident—again I wouldn't know. In any case, the hospital people didn't take long to convince him that I was suffering from delusions. Later, he himself put it more neatly: after he'd heard the bones of my story for the third or fourth time—the time he brought the reporters from Nairobi to ask me a whole new set of silly questions—I heard him say to the reporters, as they left the ward and just before he shut the door: "Better not print any of that. The fellow's a nut!" He was a nice chap but, like most policemen, simple. I saw him only twice after that, and never told him I'd heard his remark to the newspaper men. It would have embarrassed him.

One thing that made it easy for them to think that I was imagining it all is that I'm a writer. I told the psychiatrist that I only wrote travel books and articles, not fiction of any sort, but this cut no ice at all. I was a writer, and writers have uncontrollable imaginations. On top of that, I'd had my skull practically split open, so that my wild imaginings had, to me, become truth. That was how they saw it and it saved them further thought. Between them they almost convinced me, too, that I was mad, but it's quite a long time ago now, and I know that I'm at least as sane as they are. I know, too,

that it all happened, exactly as I told them, lying flat and trussed on that hospital bed while they sat and stood and stooped around me, their faces blatantly, sometimes almost rudely, disbelieving. That's another thing, now that I can think of it from the distance of a couple of years, which must have convinced them that my memories were hallucinations. While I was answering their 'trick' questions, I could see their smug expressions of disbelief and disparagement. It was hot in the ward, and in my plaster and bandages I was in constant discomfort; I used to get irritated, sometimes downright angry, so I'd raise my voice and the sweat'd run down the exposed parts of my face and I suppose I really did seem and sound unbalanced. I remember the psychiatrist referring to my 'moods', but at the time had no idea what he meant. Now I can understand their doubts; even if I wonder, still, what a psychiatrist's good for when he has less perception and more personal inhibitions than many of his patients!

But that's enough of the hospital; I must get on with the story. When I think back on it, the picture that comes first to my mind is one of startling, shocking clarity. I was in the bush, in Nyasaland, close to the north bank of the Rukuru and not far from Njakwa. It was about one-thirty a.m. and the night was pitch-black, no moon at all. (What I was doing in the bush, on my own and in the middle of the night, we'll come to later.)

The picture is this. A slave caravan (thirty or fifty native women, some of them girls not much more than children), in double file, was shuffling northwards through the bush. Each of them had a loop of chain around her waist, shackled to a longer one which ran down the whole length of the line between the two files of near-naked women. Alongside the procession walked guards, themselves Africans, carrying rhino-hide whips. The chains clinked and rattled and even from the distance at which I was standing I could hear the women's panting breath, like the gasping of hard-pressed animals.

You may be wondering how I saw all this, and in such

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detail on a very dark night. Well, to me, that is the worst horror of it: I saw the slaves driven past in the bright and glaring headlights of a car; it was parked on the edge of the clearing, and a white man was standing beside the bonnet smoking a cheroot and chatting to an enormous half-caste who carried a rifle lightly in the crook of his arm. I had seen the car before. It was a yellow Ford.

For a moment, now, in my capacity of editor to which Ted Carpenter's letter appoints me, I must interrupt with some words of my own; we can come back to the letter later. Before we go on to the story (which he had typed so clumsily and at such rambling length that I have had to cut out whole pages, let alone paragraphs) I must from my own knowledge confirm that he did indeed have a serious accident of some sort up in Tanganyika and nearly died from its effects. In a way he *did* die; when he came down to the Cape he was a changed man—morose, silent, and aggressive. He lost all his friends by downright rudeness to anyone who tried to help him. About three months after his return, he left, as far as I know for Johannesburg, and I have never seen him since. This letter and typescript reached me two years after he had left the Cape. There was no address on the letter, but the brown-paper parcel in which it arrived had been posted in East Africa. I know this only from the stamps; the postmark was too blurred to read.

TED'S STORY-I

I MADE A LIVING out of writing; but, unless you live in Southern Africa, it's unlikely that you'll have heard my name—Ted Carpenter. I wrote books about South Africa and Rhodesia: animals, off-the-track places and stories of old settler history which I dug out of discoloured newspapers and old men's memories. They were published in book form by my friend Jimmy Townsend, who has his business in Cape Town, where I lived, but they get no farther than the shops, libraries and shelves of South and Central Africa. You might think, if you knew anything of that territory or of the book trade, that this was a pretty small field, and from the point of view of ordinary book-selling you'd be right, but my case is special. My subjects are of such strong local interest, close to so many people who live in their settings, that an unusually high proportion of the literate public made a point of getting each one as it came out: on top of that, a very important factor is that I paid South African tax on my earnings. If they'd been published in London, what I'd have gained in fame I'd have lost at the rate of nine and sixpence in the pound. Believe me, it makes a difference—the difference between a living and a hobby.

When I say that I made a living out of these books, I might add that Jimmy Townsend made a great deal more. I never grudged it to him; it was his money we were risking in the first place (not mine, because I hadn't any, after I'd left the Army and spent my gratuity) and he's brilliant at his job. He's a great gambler: loses a fortune every

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week on horses, and picks it up again, over the week-end, at poker. I doubt if he makes or loses much in the long run: just likes to see the stuff changing hands. But there's one thing he'll never gamble on, and that's a book. If Jimmy publishes anything, he knows for sure it's going to sell.

He was the reason for this trip I took. We were lunching together at his club in Cape Town, and I mentioned to him that I had an idea for a book, quite different to anything I'd done before, on one particular Mau Mau story which I'd picked up from a newspaper; but I needed to spend a month or more up in Kenya to get the background right. I called it an idea for a book because it was a publisher I was talking to; in fact, it was much more like an idea for a film script.

Jimmy was interested, chiefly because he'd an idea of his own and it struck him at once that I'd be able to kill two birds with one stone. His idea involved getting some new colour pictures of game and scenery for him to use in an outsize tourist brochure, a booklet of pictures, maps and general information which he planned to sell to the shipping companies for distribution to prospective passengers. I thought the scheme was a bit crazy, because there's a Tourist Corporation which issues dozens of very well designed pamphlets of this sort, quite free of charge, to anyone that wants them; but as his idea fitted my own plans, and it was his money, I didn't argue long. He agreed to advance me the expenses for the trip (he never quibbled at handing out a pound when he thought he'd be getting back ten) and I persuaded him to let me take his Dodge station-wagon. In England we call them shooting-brakes, or used to, anyway; but here they tend to the American terminology. This wagon was more than a year old and Jimmy had been thinking of trading it in for a new model; he had a new Bentley, and a Cadillac which his wife used as a run-about, so the absence of the Dodge

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wouldn't bother him. A station-wagon was just what I needed, because when I wanted to I could doss down in the back of it. In Central Africa the good hotels are always full unless you've booked well in advance; I didn't want to do that, because I hate being tied to a fixed itinerary. As for the hotels that aren't 'good' . . . well, I'd rather sleep in the car than get eaten alive.

That is how it came about that in the middle of July I locked up my Cape Town flat, climbed into Townsend's big, blue motor-car in the back of which I'd already stowed my gear (including a primus stove, canned food, bedding, spare petrol in jerry cans, chains for the tyres in case the rains started much earlier than usual, and a whole lot of stuff that I'd probably never need but daren't go without) and drove, without hurrying, out through Paarden Eiland and on to the National Road. There was no need for speed because I'd planned to stop that first night at the new motel at Beaufort West, and that's an easy half-day's run. The next day I'd get under way early in the morning to cover the other six hundred miles to Johannesburg.

I am always sorry to leave Cape Town, always thinking more of the return than of the departure. The Cape Peninsula and its immediate hinterland are by far the most attractive part of the African continent; if you tell me that this is no great distinction, I'll add that it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. I love the beaches, the mountains, the vineyards and the oaks; I am fascinated by the inexplicable, almost hysterical, happiness of the Cape Coloureds in their rags or festive silks; and I'll confess I like the wine, which has the additional merit, bought directly from the wineries, of being very cheap. As a matter of fact I like some of the people, too: so, for these things and for the whole smell of the place (even when the wind's in the north, coming in over the Victoria Basin so that the town reeks of fish), I'm sad when I have to leave.

Yet, as I drove out along a road flanked by vineyards stretching left and right to the sides of the hills which border the valley, and headed the Dodge towards the pass that climbs the mountains (and in bad weather is sometimes hidden in the clouds), my spirits were not unduly low. Going away is never so bad when one can count on a day of return: I could envisage that rushing southward over the passes and through the valleys which become softer and more beautiful with every mile covered towards the coast; an experience so delightful and exciting that it is worth a brief exile for the thrill it always holds. This pleasure of arrival from the north is heightened by the fact that to reach the Cape's loveliness it is necessary, southbound, to traverse the contrasting ugliness of bleak stretches of scorched earth, a vast and arid desolation of baked soil and thorn scrub which is known as the Karoo.

Sheep manage somehow to survive in these wastes, and there are small towns and villages in which human beings live; but the settlements are so far apart and surrounded by such topographical misery that a stranger might well imagine the area to be uninhabited, except by meerkats and other small, stoat-like animals which streak across the road ahead of his car, with their tails flying out like pennants. The road, long and blue-black and straight as a ruler, bores for hour after hour into the quivering, dun-coloured landscape; from the top of each rise the weary driver can see the same road thirty miles ahead, so that there are no surprises to relieve the monotony. If there is a house or any building within sight of the road, its roadside wall is likely to carry a large and garish advertisement for beer or brandy. Small wonder that here, in the Karoo, there is a brisk demand for both.

Olive Schreiner is reputed to have loved the Karoo: it has always struck me as hard to reconcile this popular belief with the fact that, as soon as she was able to leave it, she did so, and took up residence in London.

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The town of Beaufort West is, by the standards of these parts, a large one; and a few hours after I had left Cape Town I was easing my foot on the accelerator to enter its southern boundary. The motel is a mile or so out on the other side, but I stopped first at a garage to fill up with petrol so that I could get away early in the morning. As soon as I stopped the car, so that the air was no longer rushing through, the heat began to build up as if it was an oven in which I was sitting. When they'd filled the tank I drove on again, fast, my shirt already wet through with sweat. The motel came up on the right, and I could see that the ROOMS AVAILABLE sign was up; I could see, too, a couple of people using the swimming bath—that bath had been in my mind for the last two hundred miles. In less than ten minutes I had signed the register, paid for my night's lodging, parked the Dodge outside the room allotted to me, wrenched open a suitcase and changed into swimming trunks; less than a minute after that, my nose scraped the tiles on the bottom of the pool and the world was suddenly all cool comfort and relief.

Next morning I was on the road again by six, and had a combined breakfast and lunch three hundred miles farther on, at Edenburg in the Orange Free State. It was still early afternoon when I crossed the Vaal river, and at tea-time I was nosing the car cautiously through the traffic which does daylong battle for supremacy, or at any rate survival, in the streets of Johannesburg. There is a saying that in Johannesburg a pedestrian is a man who has been lucky enough to find a parking space for his car. I didn't even look for one: Johannesburg is not a town I stop in if I can help it. I drove through and out the other side as fast as the clogging traffic and a loose observance of the laws permitted; but it was the start of the rush hour, the road out to the north was packed with tired shoppers and irritable office-workers, and it was six o'clock by the time I made Pretoria. I booked in at a small hotel on the edge

of the town, and fell asleep that night with a ribbon of tarmac still stretching out before my eyes and the scrunch of fast-passing cars intermittent in my ears.

On the third day I made another dawn start, this time with a packet of sandwiches beside me on the seat. The going was good; I was over the Limpopo and into Southern Rhodesia, passing all the Customs and Immigration formalities (double, one lot on each side of the border, the Limpopo River, where, according to Kipling, the elephant got his trunk), before they closed the barriers for the officials to enjoy their lunch hour. I took the right fork for the direct route to Salisbury; at Fort Victoria I left the main road and took the dirt one to the Ruins Hotel, where I planned to spend the night. I arrived well before dark and, to stretch my legs after two days in a sitting position, strolled down to where the ruins start: I remembered that this was the place Cecil Rhodes selected as a burial ground for Allan Wilson and his Shangani Patrol, the men who were slaughtered by the Matabele in 1893. They've been moved since then, or rather their bones and saddlery have, to the Matopos Hills, but their original tomb is preserved as one of several memorials to them. As I climbed the rough steps I passed a notice exhorting me to refrain from writing my name upon the tomb; this struck me as unnecessary, if not actually offensive: yet, when I came to the stone pile and looked down on the bronze plate which covers it, I saw that hundreds of men and women had in fact mutilated it with their signatures. I thought, perhaps they spit in church, too! Wishing that I hadn't seen it, I made my way back to the hotel and into the bar.

The next day's run was easy and pleasant: to Umtali first, and from there by the excellent tarred road to Salisbury, where I arrived at tea-time—three and a half days and seventeen hundred miles out of Cape Town. The first thing I did, before I'd even unpacked, was to telephone Harry Clewes at his office: Harry's an insurance broker

His telephonist kept me waiting for some minutes, and then he came on the line, gruffly, the busy man interrupted in the middle of his crossword puzzle. "Clewes, here."

"Hello, Clewes! Ted, here."

There was a moment's silence. Then he said, flatly: "Ted! Funny you should ring."

This was hardly the reaction I had expected. There was no surprise or pleasure in his tone. I asked him, sharply: "What d'you mean, funny?"

Once again there was a short silence and I could hear him breathing into the mouthpiece of his telephone receiver. He asked me, then: "What the devil was in that last drink you gave me last night?"

I laughed. "The wrong Ted, Harry. This is Carpenter. I drank alone last night." It took a little time to convince him that I was in fact Ted Carpenter, but once it had registered in his mind, which seemed to be working more slowly than it usually does, we were on firm ground. We arranged that he and his wife, Victoria, would dine with me that same night at my hotel; and that the next day, Saturday, I would lunch with them at the New Club and go with them to the races. Harry is a good man to go racing with in Salisbury; he owns two horses and often knows which of the others are likely to win.

If it seems that I have been digressing, let me explain that it was on that Saturday afternoon, in the members' enclosure, towards the end of the day, that the whole thing started.

TED'S STORY-II

WRITING NOW from a different and distant perspective, so far beyond the extraordinary events of which this was the start, I have to shut my mind to all that followed and concentrate on recapturing the feel and atmosphere of a time that must have been, by comparison with what came after, extravagantly care-free. I suppose that I had worries of a minor sort: the job that I'd come to do; doubts as to its commercial success; whether resources would measure up to expenses and whether Townsend's car would stand up to the long journey over rough roads without giving me trouble. . . . Yet, looking back on it now, I cannot remember that I had any reason to entertain doubts or anxieties. I was fit and solvent; my private life was no longer complicated as it had been; I was spending an afternoon at the races for the fun of it, not caring whether I won, lost, or broke even. I suppose—and this is something seen more easily in retrospect than at the time—that I was happy.

Certainly I had eaten an excellent lunch with Harry and Victoria. Their club had been full of people who, like us, intended to spend the rest of the day on the race-course; there was an atmosphere of gaiety that you could almost touch. Salisbury has always seemed to me to be a happy place—a place where values rise, where businesses expand and life is enjoyed because today is good and tomorrow is likely to be better.

Before lunch we had drinks at the cocktail bar. To an inhabitant of the Union of South Africa, cocktail bars are

an attractive feature of the Rhodesian scene, because women use them and bring to them an elegance taken for granted in most parts of the world but sadly lacking in South African bars, which women are not permitted to enter. There a woman is prohibited by law from seeing her drink poured from the bottle: she has to sit outside in the 'lounge', and have it brought to her on a tray. Deprived of women's civilising influence, the bars suffer, and become bare, loud places, about as sophisticated as public lavatories.

By the time we had parked Harry's car and made our way to the members' enclosure, the first race had been run and the numbers were going up on the board while queues formed quickly at the windows of the tote shed; the grass received the afternoon's first shower of torn tickets. Harry led us straight to the paddock and we sat down on one of the long benches to study our cards, while we waited to see the runners in the second race. Neither of Harry's horses was running at this meeting: I was glad of it, because I'd have had to've backed them, out of politeness, and it takes the fun out of racing if one is obliged to stake money on animals which are notoriously unathletic. Harry, to give him his due, was as aware as anyone else of his nags' limitations, but he suffered from an unexplainable conviction that one day they—or at any rate one of them—would flash out ahead of the field and give all Salisbury the surprise of its life. I was present one day when he advanced this opinion; his trainer, who was also in the party, tossed back a drink quickly and smiled: "Wouldn't be a surprise, Harry," he murmured, and Harry's eyes shone at the unexpected support, the ray of hope from an expert. The trainer held out his empty glass and added: "No, it wouldn't be a surprise. It'd be a bloody miracle!"

I hear they've built a new race-course at Salisbury now. I liked the old one and the small, colonial look of it, but the locals objected to it for a number of reasons, the main

one being that as the sun went down in the late afternoon it blinded people in the stand. I suppose they've built houses or factories all over it now. At that time, though, it served another purpose—a small area of safety for aircraft taking off from the 'old' airfield. The town had spread out fast in recent years, and planes taking off had to fly low over the business centre on their way up. If something went wrong at take-off, a pilot might be able to put down on the race-course rather than crash into a block of offices or flats. I don't know if it ever happened: in any case there's a new airport now, farther out.

The horses filtered into the paddock, led by their native grooms, and circled round. We marked our cards, changed our minds and re-marked them. It made not the slightest difference, this inspection. People came up around us, and Harry and Victoria seemed to know most of them. They knew much more about the people than they seemed to know about the horses. All the women complimented Victoria on the hat she was wearing; they did it either verbally, or by glancing at it once or twice with that feline interest which women show in a hat much better than the one they're wearing themselves. Most of them looked as if they'd borrowed flower-pots out of other people's gardens or lampshades out of pubs; they looked cheerful enough until they clapped eyes on the small straw thing on Victoria's head. Victoria is a good-looking woman and, although she lives in Southern Africa, she has a dress sense.

This is more than could be said of Harry. His hat was a shapeless grey felt in which I can imagine he watched cricket when he was at school; and whenever he goes to the races he wears a yellow tie with brown horses' heads on it, a tie such as tipsters sometimes wear on English courses. I have no doubt that Victoria must have discussed these things with him more than once during their five or six years of marriage, and it is something to be said

in favour of Harry's inviolable conservatism that he has stuck to his principles and remained not only the owner of the worst horses in the Colony, but also the worst-dressed owner. As I looked around me in the members' enclosure I realised that such a distinction would not be easy to achieve.

The parade over, we went off to place our bets. I had selected a horse more or less at random, and I joined the cheap queue at the far end of the tote shed, and took a five-shilling ticket to win. When you bet in such small amounts and with so little knowledge there isn't much point in going in for 'places'; it's win or lose. It seems to me—this may be a poor man's jealousy—that people who bet in large sums of money are either very knowledgeable, or crooks, or idiots. For myself, I like the sights and sounds of race-courses, the excitement and the atmosphere: if the afternoon costs me no more than a pound or two, I've had my money's worth.

By the time I'd come out of the line of small-time punters, I'd lost all trace of the Cleweses. Harry'd gone to a bookie to register his bets, and I'd last seen Victoria talking to some women who'd come up from Bulawayo for this meeting. (The races at Salisbury and at Bulawayo were run on alternate Saturdays, and there was a fierce rivalry between the two clubs.)

In the hope of catching sight of Harry I climbed a few steps up the stand and stood there looking down on the swirl of the crowd, a pleasant, colourful scene. I'd been enjoying it for a minute or two when I saw Harry ambling slowly across the turf in the middle of it all; his large hands were full of betting slips and it struck me that he must have backed just about every horse in the race. Just at this moment—he'd been examining the tickets as he strolled along, like a tank, the crowd parting before him and closing in again behind—he glanced up, perhaps to see where he was going, and his amiable expression changed,

as I looked at it, to one of sharp consternation. I looked for what he'd seen, and there was Victoria just a few yards away and in his line of advance; she was still talking to the Bulawayo women. Harry wheeled about smartly and set off back the way he had come. I hurried down the steps, and caught up with him. "Hey, Harry!"

He turned. "Oh, there you are. What about a drink?" I thought immediately of ice-cold beer, and in this powerfully hot sun the idea was appealing. We headed for the bar, which was round behind the stand. On the way, Harry asked me: "Did you happen to see those females she was with?"

I told him that I had, and he didn't speak again until I'd ordered some beer. I added, after this interval in which no other subject had been raised: "I saw you noticed them; too."

He smiled, grimly. "I was almost engaged to one of them, once. Just another couple of days and she'd have had me on the mat. When I see her now, I always think to myself, 'There, but for the grace of God, cringe I!' Only it wasn't the grace of God, it was the luck of meeting Victoria. Cheers!"

The beer was marvellous. We drank it quickly and went back into the railside crowd to see the second race. One of the horses Harry had backed came in first and mine was second: this was the first leg of the double and Harry became very excited, impatient that there was a third race at all, waiting only for the fourth, which was the second leg of the big prize. He asked me why I wasn't away to collect my winnings and, when I told him that I only backed horses to win, stared at me for a moment without speaking. Then he shambled off to collect his own place-money: he'd been on my horse, and the third as well.

Looking round, I saw Victoria coming towards me. She must have shaken off those Bulawayo women. She told me that she was thirsty, parched from small-talk, and wanted

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orange juice, so I took her to the bar I'd just left and drank another beer while she had it. Then we went back and found Harry at the rails. He told us that a horse named Curly Wee was going to win this next race; he had good authority for being sure of it, he said. Victoria disagreed. The women she'd been talking to had informed her that a Bulawayo mare, Brigitte, was a dead certainty. They'd assured her that nobody outside a small circle of Bulawayans was aware of this, and that the odds would consequently be long; they'd sworn her to secrecy. Victoria was going to back this Brigitte both ways; the Bulawayo women had told her that even if the usual Salisbury racing manners such as boring, crowding and cutting-in (for which this track was apparently notorious in other parts of the Colony) deprived the mare of her otherwise assured victory, not even the African National Congress could keep her out of a place.

Harry grinned. "Ted only backs horses to win," he told his wife. I said that in the circumstances I was going to waive a lifetime principle and back Brigitte both ways. Apart from any other consideration, I liked the name. Victoria smiled at me approvingly, but Harry shrugged his shoulders and repeated that only one horse could be counted on to do any good at all, and that was Curly Wee, number five; he made this statement in a tone of authority, glancing at me and then staring at Victoria. I looked up at the horses which were now circling round inside the white railing—we'd strolled over to the paddock while we'd been talking—and I saw number five straight away. The poor thing looked as if it needed a square meal, a good night's rest and a spare set of lungs: its head, gaunt and wearing an expression of extreme suffering, drooped like a wet Panamanian flag, and the power which kept the animal moving round with its fellows seemed to me to be the physical strength of the boy who was dragging it. Brigitte, on the other hand, provided a sharp contrast: a

pretty, compact little mare, fairly dancing on her toes, she was all her groom could handle.

I asked Harry: "Have you looked at your Curly Wee?"

He still had his back to the paddock and his eyes on the race-card. Without looking up he told me: "I don't need to. . . . If you two have made up your minds, shall we go?"

Victoria was smiling to herself as we strolled over to the tote. Quite plainly she was convinced that Harry, the know-all, was going to come a cropper. We separated to our own queues, myself in the five bobs, and I spent ten on Brigitte.

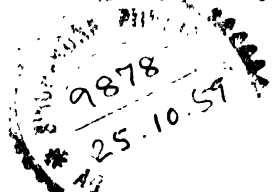
When Curly Wee won by three lengths, and Brigitte romped prettily in among the rearguard, Harry added insult to injury by not saying that he'd told us so. He didn't even look it; just sighed, and floundered off to collect his not inconsiderable profit. It turned out that we wouldn't have won much anyway, because those Bulawayo women had been all round the enclosure two or three times swearing everyone to complete secrecy, and there was a lot of money on Brigitte.

For the fourth race, after that lesson, I decided to back whichever horse Harry thought likely to win. This was the second leg of the double, and of great importance to him since he'd come home on the first. The animal he'd selected was a stringy grey with knock-knees and lacklustre eyes and it won with such ease that the rest of the field might have been hobbled mules. This put me all square, except for what I'd spent on beer and fruit juice. Harry, on the other hand, had won enough to push his net profits into three figures.

You'd imagine, I dare say, that after the lesson of these last two races a sensible man in my situation would not, from then on, back any horse whose chances of winning were not endorsed by Harry Clewes; if he'd been anywhere near me when the fifth race came up, I would cer-

tainly have asked him for his advice and taken it, but he was not. He had encountered the Bulawayo women whom normally he was desperate to avoid, whom most days of the year he would have climbed thorn trees to escape, and while he is not, as I've already indicated, an I-told-you-so man, he'd been unable to resist the temptation to stop and congratulate them on the performance of the Bulawayo mare, Brigitte. So he was not with me, nor was Victoria, when the horses paraded for the fifth race. There was one, a bay, numbered eight (I forget its name, if I ever knew it), which struck me as being in the wrong class altogether. Beside the dozen others which accompanied it around the paddock, this number eight was undoubtedly a winner. It was, if you understand the way I felt about it, a *race-horse*, and I stood admiring this noble animal and thinking about it until it was actually leaving the ring; then, suddenly frightened that I might be too late, I half-walked and half-ran to the five-bob queue. The betting was nearly finished and the queue was short. Just as I came up to the window, it struck me that to wager my normal five shillings on such a plain certainty would be niggardly. I ducked out, went to the ten-bob line, and backed number eight to win.

The last of the horses had cantered up towards the start by the time I found Harry and Victoria. They were in the grand-stand and, when I squeezed my way into the close crowd around them, Victoria asked me which horse I'd put my money on. I told her and she looked, immediately, less gay. Harry, I noticed, had begun to laugh. It began as a controlled chuckle but got out of hand rapidly, and it was some minutes before he was able to speak coherently. A couple close in front of us, who'd heard what I'd said about backing number eight and its obvious distinction in a field of donkeys, had looked round at me quickly, and the man was sniggering now, while I could see that his wife was telling their friends, on her left, what the joke



was. They kept turning and glancing up at me, trying to make the looks seem accidental. I asked Harry: "Perhaps you'd have an explanation?"

"I'm sorry, Ted." I thought, he's commiserating, now. "You . . . your horse . . . just loped by us, there. Coloured man up."

They were all looking at me now, with no more pretence about it; but I still didn't get the point. If they were expecting me to faint, they must have been disappointed. I asked Harry: "Well?"

Victoria took over and explained to me how there was a rule here that a Coloured jockey could be engaged only when the sixteen white ones were already employed. In this race, she pointed out, there were seventeen runners; the owner of my horse must have neglected to book his jockey in advance, and that was why there was a Coloured lad in its saddle. I thanked her for the explanation, and asked how this application of a local club rule was likely to affect the performance of the animal I'd backed.

"The man's sozzled, Ted!" Harry grinned at me as he said it. "Lolling in the saddle . . . *drooling*. They must have pulled him out of a bar, or found him lying down in the long grass with an empty bottle."

They were still laughing about it when the false starts began. Number eight was causing the trouble, the loud-speaker told us. Its jockey was having trouble with the reins. A gust of laughter rippled over the grand-stand, and then the speaker informed us that number eight had been given its last chance; if it messed up the next start, it would be out, disqualified. Victoria looked unhappy; at that moment, seeing the expression on her face, I loved her and envied Harry.

The warning must have had its effect, because suddenly the loud-speaker shouted, with an element of surprise in its tone, that they were *off*. And, by heavens, they were! At least, number eight was. The rest of the field looked

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as if they were following its scent. From start to finish, number eight was the only horse in the race: as it swept in a surge of lovely unbroken power around the bend and into the straight I was running across the turf towards the rails, and to this day I don't know how I got down out of that stand, through the crowd, in so short a time. I think they must have opened their ranks and let me through. All I saw was that horse, that beautiful bay, come thundering home so far ahead of the rest that it couldn't be reckoned in lengths.

Harry'd been dead right about the jockey; he was certainly coloured, and indubitably drunk. I don't think he ever knew he'd won until they told him about it; when the owner went out and led him in, he was singing an old Cape song about a ship called the Alabama. He never dismounted; when the horse came to a standstill, its trainer gave him a push and he fell off.

I was told about this later. I'd seen my horse win and I was vaguely aware that Harry had caught up with me and was beating me on the back and roaring with laughter, and Victoria holding my hand and whooping. By that time the whole course was in an uproar . . . a lot of laughter and all sorts of shouting, much of it angry . . . the horse ought to be disqualified . . . it was a disgrace, an outrage! Before laughter drowned it, another voice called out that this was the fairest race he'd seen—the boy'd been too drunk to take orders and pull.

I wasn't listening or hearing or thinking or caring. I'd even forgotten that this was a race meeting and that my horse had won at long odds, possibly a tote record for the course. . . . I'd just seen Jane, in the crowd—her yellowish hair, her face, the wide mouth I'd kissed so often and for years told myself I'd forgotten and didn't think about. Her eyes . . . oh, *frightened*! Then she was gone, in that crowd. I had an impression that there'd been a man at her side, short, thick-set, but only an impression; I hadn't

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looked at him. I'd been looking at Jane, and suddenly she'd vanished in that yelling, thronging crowd.

Harry grabbed the tote tickets out of my hand as I shook myself clear and ran after her, shouting her name; behind me I heard Victoria asking everyone and no one: "Who on earth is Jane?" **10**

ABOUT JANE—I

AT THIS POINT I must interrupt Ted's story. In the typescript which he sent me, he provides no answer to that question, *Who is Jane?* I suppose that at the time he was writing more to me than to the public, or perhaps forgetting that some explanation of Jane would be necessary for the proper understanding of the story by people who, knowing nothing of her earlier connection with him, would have to read about their relationship in the pages that followed.

My own belief is that, when he was writing this part of his story, he was overwhelmed by the same excitement which he had felt at that moment of seeing her on the race-course; it never occurred to him to stop or go back and explain anything. In this act of writing he was as much in pursuit of her as he had been when she appeared to him so suddenly, ghostlike in a crowd of strangers, and vanished just as quickly in the very moment when he recognised her. I have edited his account of that incident; in the original it is jerky and disjointed to such an extent that it is almost unintelligible, and the typing is wildly erratic. I've no doubt at all that, as he put those words down, his mind was as taut with emotion as it had been at the moment which he was describing. I can almost see him banging the wrong keys, the tremble in his fingers as he banged them hard: the type itself is darker in those paragraphs than it is in most of the script. (This phenomenon occurs elsewhere, in several later passages of his typescript.)

It is also possible that, being as involved as he was in the telling of the tale, he deliberately left this gap for me to fill in with my own explanation. If this is the truth of it, then it explains to a large extent his sending the story to me rather than to some other friend of his with whom he might not have quarrelled so violently. I say this because our quarrel arose out of his relationship with Jane. Others may have known of it, many must have guessed or suspected. I, on the other hand, saw it start, and saw it end.

I must admit that I have filled in some small parts of this account with supposition; in defence of it I would draw the analogy that, when an anthropologist has in his possession a complete skeleton, it is not difficult for him to work out where the membranes and the sinews ran, and from there to clothe it all with flesh.

At the time I'm now writing about, I had a small farm cottage among the vineyards of Constantia, in the Cape. I was unmarried and had nobody to support except myself and a dog, and I was making enough out of my novels to do that fairly comfortably. The cottage had two rooms and a kitchen; there were trees behind it and an open sweep of vineyard in front. I paid eight pounds a month for it to the company which owned all the land around and also the wholesale winery which was only a few hundred yards away.

The nearest house was the Carpenters'. Ted and his wife, Penny—yes, he was married, then—had been in this house at least a year before I took the cottage, and I met them quite by chance just a week after I'd moved in. They were taking their dogs, a Doberman and a wire-haired terrier, for a walk, and I had mine with me, and the three of them began fighting. My hound, Pretzel, started it. He was a cross between a Dachshund and an Irish terrier, about three feet long and nine inches high at the shoulder,

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with a large head and short, strong legs. His front legs, owing to the after-effects of an illness when he was a puppy, curved outwards from his chest, came together at the knees and then went outwards again in wide, splay feet. For all that, he could go like the wind and swim like an otter. He was extremely affectionate to me and, in fact, to all humans, but he hated other dogs unless they were bitches; the moment he spotted these other two trotting ahead of Ted and Penny Carpenter he went after them like a torpedo. The fight lasted only about thirty seconds before the Carpenters' dogs took to their heels; when Pretzel came waddling slowly back a few minutes later, smiling happily to himself, those others were either up trees or in Stellenbosch. He was killed about a year later, by a drunken farm worker with whom he was trying to make friends.

That was how I met Ted and his wife. A few days later they invited me to a party at their house, and after that Ted quite often dropped in to see me in my cottage. We used to drink wine and try to work out how other men made big money out of writing. Penny never came; there was always some excuse at the beginning, but after a time I came to realise, mostly from Ted's laboured and well-meaning explanations, that his wife considered visiting a bachelor, who was also a novelist, in his hovel in the woods, to imply slumming, if not immorality.

Ted was writing his first books then, his chatty local-colour stuff, but he also had a job in an advertising agency in Cape Town. Penny liked to think of his writing as a hobby or an eccentricity, like playing with trains or keeping snakes. I knew that he was hoping one day to make his whole living out of it, but he'd only mentioned that ambition to her on one occasion; she'd just smiled at him as if she was indulging a childish whim. As far as she was concerned, a man made his living in an office, from nine to five.

I only picked this up by listening between the lines of Ted's conversation over a period of a year or more, and by her reactions whenever, in her presence, the business of writing came into the conversation.

Perhaps I should describe the two of them. Ted was taller than average, with ginger hair and rather distant blue eyes, slim, and quick in his movements. Penny was the exact opposite: small and dumpy, with mouse-coloured hair. I think—well, I know—that she was fond of him; and *fond* is the word, because love would be much too violent an emotion for Penny. She would probably have regarded such a power of feeling as undignified, even improper. She and Ted had been married for five or six years and had no children. They were totally unsuited to each other—the sort of pair whom (if they had not, inexplicably, been man and wife) one would hesitate to ask to the same dinner party unless there were a lot of other guests so that it wouldn't matter.

They had a nice house; rather nicer, I think, than Ted could afford. I was often aware that he envied my much simpler way of living, the fact that I wasted no money on 'appearances' and so could afford to take a holiday abroad once a year, or occasionally to take a girl to some restaurant which the Carpenters would have avoided because of the level of its tariff. Ted would probably have lived that way, too, given his own way. As it was, all he earned went into a house which was much bigger than he needed, to the wages of two servants and a gardener, to the upkeep of a tennis court, and in throwing occasional parties which were the highlights of Penny's existence. The same group of people met about once a week in one house or another, more or less in rotation around the neighbourhood: they discussed servants, children and golf; swallowed a few drinks, and went back to their own homes until next week. Few of them read anything other than the local newspapers, so the conversation was limited in its scope;

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Ted rarely spoke at all, except to answer questions.

This was his life: a straitjacket. I have described it not in order to disparage his wife or his friends, but as some explanation of his subsequent behaviour. Watching Ted was like watching a boiler with its safety-valve tied down; sooner or later there was going to be an explosion. I see that now, looking back on it; at the time I was only rather sorry for him, all the sorrier in realising, as he must have done himself, that it was entirely his fault, that he as good as asked for it when he married Penny.

Not far away there was a house owned by some people called Roberts. Normally I avoided the local cocktail parties, even when I was asked to them, which wasn't often; but the Roberts moved in wider circles and at their house one met people who lived in other districts and even other countries. They were Rhodesians who had settled in the Cape because their children were at school there, and because, although he was still a comparatively young man, he'd made enough money in Rhodesia to retire in comfort. Not that Steve slacked; he painted water-colours, and worked hard at it, keeping office hours in his studio as strictly as if he made his living by it. He held an exhibition about once a year. I had one of his pictures in my cottage: a view of Table Mountain from an unusual angle, with the south-easter rolling clouds that looked like bales of feathers across its top. I'd often seen the mountain and the clouds look like that, and I liked the picture, but I couldn't say if it was good or bad from an artistic point of view.

One day Steve telephoned and asked me if I'd come to drinks with them on an evening a few days ahead. I hesitated, and he said quickly: "There's someone I particularly want you to meet."

I asked: "Who?"

Steve chuckled. "Honestly, Mike, you won't be sorry."

I caught the tone of that chuckle at once. The Robertses had never approved of my girl-friends, and they thought it was time I got married. "Match-making again, Steve?"

"You don't have to come if you don't want to." He sounded hurt.

I went. So did Ted and Penny; in fact they gave me a lift in their car. Penny was wearing one of her po-shaped hats and a frilly dress that made her look rather like the daughter of an 1820 Settler, and Ted's face was set in that here-we-go-again expression which it always wore on these occasions. None of us had anything to say to each other. There were only a couple of hundred yards of tarmac to cover, then we turned into the Robertses' gravel drive and scrunched up to the house. There were already half a dozen cars parked outside it, all of them big, shiny ones, so that we began to feel cramped and shabby as Ted parked his little Morris Minor between a new Ford and a last-year's Cadillac. (Ted had two cars, this one, and a baby Fiat in which Penny did her shopping and drove herself to tennis parties.)

The Robertses' maid, a Cape Coloured girl, met us at the door and ushered us into the drawing-room, a big, pleasant room, with french windows that opened on to a terraced lawn and a view right over Tokai to the sea. When we came in, the room was already full of people and you couldn't see the french windows. Steve came hurrying over to meet us and his wife waved from a group near the open stone fireplace; Penny went straight over to her. Steve asked Ted and me what we'd drink and, while we were making these arrangements, I looked quickly round the room and was disappointed to see that there was nobody present whom I hadn't met before. Steve Roberts was asking me: "Well, Steve? Whisky?"

"Sorry . . . No—I'd rather have a pink gin, please." I glanced at Ted then, and saw that he was staring across the room with an expression on his face that I'd never seen

on it before. He looked as if, spiritually, he'd left himself outside there in the drive: that bored, angry look had vanished; he was both absorbed and excited.

I turned to see what he was looking at so intently. A knot of people, all male and all of whom I knew, had drifted open, and in the middle of their group I saw a girl. It's not easy to describe her. She wasn't beautiful, and she certainly wasn't 'pretty'. Her hair was tawny more than blonde; she had high cheek-bones and a wide mouth. Her eyes, which from here looked green, were intensely alive. She was talking to the man nearest her, a stockbroker named Henning; and all the others, four of them, were looking at her as she spoke.

At that moment Penny called, quite loudly, "Ted!" She was standing with Steve's wife and all the other wives as well, over there by the fireplace. Ted didn't seem to hear her and she called to him again with an edge to her tone. He glanced vaguely round then, and for a moment I thought he hadn't recognised her. But a second later a change came over his face; he nodded, smiled, and moved obediently across the room to join the circle of women. I thought: There, but for the determination to remain single . . . and with a flood of sheer exhilaration filling my mind I looked back at the girl with the yellow hair. I was looking at her—she was still talking to Henning—when Steve took hold of my arm, and I heard that same dry chuckle of his.

"Come over and meet her, lad. . . . I told you you wouldn't be sorry, didn't I?"

I had her pretty well to myself for most of that party. I learnt that her name was Jane Fairley, that she'd arrived in the Cape from Durban a month ago, that she was twenty-four and a divorcee. She had taken a flat in Sea Point and was looking round for a job that would suit her. She hadn't worked for the two years that she'd been

married, so her shorthand and typing were a bit rusty (they'd never been good, she said) and she was thinking of taking a refresher course at some secretarial place. I asked her how she knew the Roberts family, and she told me that she'd known them in Durban a long time ago, before she was married and when they used to spend their holidays there from Rhodesia. I gathered that she'd left Durban because she hadn't wanted to go on living there after her divorce, which had apparently—she didn't really say this, I deduced it from what she *didn't* say—attracted a great deal of publicity and gossip.

She asked me about myself and I told her what there was to tell. These exchanges, peppered with small-talk and many interruptions, must have taken a good hour to swap; it didn't seem anything like as long as that. Suddenly it was time to go; one or two couples had in fact left, and we were still talking—or, rather, at this moment, I was. I had turned to take a new pink gin off the tray which the maid had brought to us; when I'd put some water in it and turned back to Jane, still talking, I saw that she wasn't listening. She was looking over my shoulder. I stopped in the middle of a sentence and glanced round to see what was interesting her so much more than my monologue: it was Ted Carpenter. From opposite sides of the room they were looking at each other as if there was some bond between them which only they out of all the people in the room knew anything about.

I suppose she realised that my voice was no longer droning, because she looked back at me quickly and smiled. "I'm so sorry. You must think I'm awfully rude."

"No. . . . You've met Ted?"

"Is that his name? Ted what?"

"Carpenter. His wife is the short woman in the white hat."

She didn't even glance at Penny. Either she'd seen her

already or it didn't matter to her. Ted came over as if a magnet was pulling him across the room, and I introduced them. He began asking her much the same sort of questions as I'd been asking an hour ago, only somehow more intimately, as though he and she already knew as much as they needed to know about each other and these were the details he was filling in. I stood it for about two minutes and then I left them and went over to talk to Steve and his wife, a thing I should have done long ago if I'd had any manners. Penny was with them; we chatted for a bit, then she glanced at the clock and caught her breath. "Oh, *dear!* We should have gone *ages* ago!"

Steve smiled and murmured: "Nonsense, my dear. Don't go yet." His wife threw him a sharp glance and it was plain that she was on Penny's side; the party should have ended.

Penny tried to give the impression that she hadn't known where Ted was; her eyes wandered round the room; locating him, she smiled, rather too brightly I thought, and she called to him: "Ted, *dear*. Come along: it's late!" Ted brought Jane over and introduced her to his wife. Penny looked at her for a fraction of a second before she acknowledged the introduction. "How nice! Are you living near here?" Jane told her, no, in Sea Point, and it seemed to me that the information brought a flicker of relief into Penny's eyes. She said: "Oh, what a pity. That's *miles* away, isn't it?" As if she didn't know where Sea Point was, when she'd been born in Rondebosch and at school in Claremont! She took Ted's arm. "We really must go. Thank you *so* much, such a *lovely* party!"

Ted nodded. "Wonderful. Thanks, Steve." He shook his hostess's hand. "Thanks so much. You're coming to us next week, aren't you?" His eyes moved quickly to Jane, as if he'd have liked to ask her, too. But he hadn't time to think of a way of doing it, because Penny was

giving little tugs at his arm, towards the door. He followed her. He looked back once, at Jane, not at anyone else, and she gave him a wave of her fingers; he smiled . . . and then they were gone, out to their car, and they'd both forgotten about giving me a lift home in it.

The Hennings were still there; they lived somewhere on the Sea Point side of the mountain; they'd brought Jane in their car and they were going to take her home. I had an idea that the three of them might be staying to supper here, so I said my thank-you's quickly to Steve's wife. She asked me: "Didn't the Carpenters bring you?"

I nodded. "It doesn't matter. Only a short walk; it'll do me good." She asked me if I wouldn't like Steve to run me over to the cottage in his car, but I told her again that I'd rather walk; I'd have walked both ways if the Carpenters hadn't insisted on bringing me. I said good-bye to the Hennings and turned to Jane.

"Good-bye." Her eyes *were* green, by the way.

"Good-bye. I do hope we'll meet again." For a moment I was surprised; then I thought: She knows I live near the Carpenters.

"Yes. Can I give you a ring?"

"That'd be lovely!" She sounded as if she meant it, and I noticed that Henning was looking at me enviously, or jealously, or both.

Steve came out to see me off. We stopped on the gravel beside Henning's Cadillac and I said: "Thanks, Steve. I had a wonderful evening."

"Nuts to that!" He looked puzzled. "You haven't even got her telephone number, have you?"

I shook my head. "I thought I could get it from you . . . if I needed it." He was still staring at me with that worried expression as I turned and walked quickly down the grass verge of the drive towards the road. I couldn't help wondering why, if he was so keen on throwing me and this girl into each other's arms, he hadn't asked me to

stay to dinner, too. It would have balanced the party, apart from anything else. Perhaps he and his wife had decided that it would be too much of a rush, too obvious. Well, it'd have been a waste of time, anyway.

Ted dropped in at my cottage the evening after the party. I could see that he was excited and trying not to show it. I greeted him as usual and without surprise, and put out a bottle of wine and two glasses. I used to get wine in gallon jars, and decant each jar into six bottles. It didn't keep, in the jar. There were several kinds from this local Winery that I liked, and I stocked them all and hardly ever drank anything else; this one, which they called Chianti, cost me less than two shillings a bottle.

"That was a good party last night." He watched me as he said it, and I knew that he'd be talking about the girl soon. He was full of her, she showed in his face; he'd only come down here to spill some of it on to me. He could hardly talk about her to his wife.

I agreed that the party had been enjoyable, in a dull sort of way. "Not up to the usual Roberts standard. I always expect a few foreign faces at theirs, not the same old crowd you see every time a cork pops."

He glanced at me sharply as if I'd offended him. Then, with a noticeable attempt to sound casual, he said: "Oh, I don't know. There was . . . that girl." He was watching me for some reaction that he wanted to see, but I looked blankly back at him as if I didn't know which girl he meant; he sat forward suddenly on his chair, forgetting the relaxed pose, and his voice rose slightly as he added, almost fiercely: "The girl you introduced me to."

"Did I?" I'd forgotten that point, and now it occurred to me that Penny would almost certainly hold me responsible, if she knew. I looked out of the window, the end one in the wall where the fireplace was; the clouds were blowing over the mountain, coming over our way,

from the north. That meant we'd have rain before long, and I mentioned this to Ted.

He nodded, curtly. "I dare say . . . You spent most of the evening talking to her. . . ."

"I did? Oh, of *course*! Jane Fairley, that's her name. Yes, a very nice girl, I thought. Have some more wine?"

He reached out and helped himself, and I noticed that his hand was shaking. The extraordinary thing about all this was that Ted had never shown the slightest interest in other women. He'd met several of my girl-friends; even to the one I had at this time, an exceptionally good-looking girl, he'd never shown anything but a rather stiff-necked politeness. He didn't even talk about women, as so many bored married men do, and heaven knows he'd had plenty of opportunity to talk about anything he wanted to, in all the hours he'd spent drinking my wine. Perhaps he'd been holding himself in, and now he couldn't any longer. It began to dawn on me that the situation was dangerous: for him, I mean, and for Penny. Up to now, my own reaction to what had happened the night before had been nothing but a slight disappointment in my own failure with Jane, in losing her interest so obviously and immediately to Ted; at the same time I'd felt a certain relief at the outcome, because my life in that sphere was already quite complicated enough.

Ted drank some wine and helped himself to a cigarette. Looking straight at me, he said: "That girl . . . Jane Fairley . . . I've never met anyone like her. When I saw her I thought I was dreaming. When I woke up this morning I really *believed* I'd been dreaming, until Penny mentioned her."

I pricked up my ears. "What did Penny say about her, Ted?"

"Oh, something about what a charming girl it was that we met last night."

"And what did you say to that?"

"Oh, I agreed with her."

"That was sensible of you."

Ted looked at me as if he didn't know what I meant. He shrugged slightly, and told me: "Penny asked me if she played tennis. Well, how should I know? So Penny said I'd talked to her for long enough, I might have asked her. . . . Penny's always looking for new people to make up tennis parties, you know."

"Yes." She'd even tried once to recruit me and that was a clear enough indication that people were hard to find.

"You know, Ted, I don't think that girl plays tennis."

He smiled, in the general direction of Sea Point. I thought, if he isn't careful, he's going to give himself away, doing that. "Nor do I, Bill. But if Penny wants to ask her, I dare say you've got her address . . . her telephone number?"

The question had come more quickly and more directly than I'd expected. I tried to keep the smile off my face as I answered: "My dear old chap, I know I'm a bachelor and therefore licentious and all that sort of thing, but I don't ask every woman I meet for her telephone number!"

Disappointment and disbelief mingled in his expression. "You didn't ask her? Really?" I thought: He actually thinks I'm holding out on him! He leant forward. "*Haven't* you got it?"

"No, Ted, I haven't. But you could always find her through Steve Roberts, couldn't you?"

He said quickly: "It's Penny who wants to get in touch with her. . . . Or might want to."

"Of course." I smiled at him. I was thinking that if I wanted to find her, I'd leave the Robertses out of it and telephone the secretarial agencies. She'd said she was in touch with them and there were only three or four of them in the town. She'd have almost certainly contacted the biggest one, so one call would probably be enough.

I went over to the mantelpiece to fill a pipe. While I

was doing it, Ted sprang to his feet and I heard him walking about the room. When I turned round he was standing looking out of the big window. He asked me: "Why do they let horses into the vineyards? I've often wondered."

"Only at this time of year. They eat the old, dry grapes, the little ones like raisins that get left when the picking season's over. The sun-kissed grapes, they call them. Cleans the vines, and it's good for the horses."

He turned round. "Well. I've wondered about that for years; or rather, seen it and not wondered. Funny how your eyes suddenly open to what's going on around you. No wonder my books haven't sold." I didn't answer that; I was lighting my pipe. Ted went on: "I've been wearing blinkers for years, and I didn't know that either." Again, I didn't comment. I didn't want to be involved in this. I thought: The wine must be stronger than I thought: he isn't pretending any more. He's out in the open, and he's telling it to me because he can't to anyone else.

Ted sat down again. "You know, Bill, I can't understand how you didn't get her telephone number. You a bachelor, and she . . . well, damn it, she's really *something*, isn't she?"

He had to talk about her. He wanted me to say yes, she's terrific, she took my breath away. Well, that was true, no doubt of it, but I wasn't going to say so. I told him: "I've all I can handle, Ted. Being a bachelor's a full-time job, you know!"

He looked at me with something like contempt. "Of all the weak-kneed . . ." but he cut that short and muttered: "Well, I'm damned!" I could read his thoughts: he was thinking that if he was in my shoes, there'd be no complications; they'd go overboard and there'd simply be Jane. Which, of course, describes his state of mind exactly; there was nothing in it but her.

He went on talking about her for an hour or more, not really saying anything, just talking, and we drank more

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wine than was in that first bottle. I let him talk on, listening without actually encouraging him. I thought it might help him if he got some of it off his chest, relieved the pressure in him. Eventually he looked at his watch and said he had to go, Penny would be worried. He stood up, and smiled.

"Thanks, Bill. I knew you'd understand."

Considering that I hadn't uttered more than a dozen words in the whole of that hour, and that I'd shown him not the slightest encouragement or even sympathy, I felt that his remark did me more than justice. I suppose it was the wine in him, and the excitement; he was seeing things the way he wanted them to be.

The light had gone while we'd been sitting there. I lent him a torch so that he wouldn't fall into any ditches on his way home to Penny, and he went off along the path that was a short cut through the trees, whistling to himself.

ABOUT JANE-II

IT WAS THE NEXT SUNDAY MORNING that Steve Roberts rang and asked me to lunch-time drinks the same day. Coming so soon after their party it was surprising, and I told him so. "What have I done to deserve so much of your gin?"

"Look, Bill"—he sounded testy—"I'm in a hurry. Will you come along?"

"Well, yes. I will. But . . ."

"About twelve, if that suits you. See you then." He rang off and I went to turn on a bath. Perhaps they'd found me another 'suitable' girl-friend. Perhaps Jane . . . I hoped not Jane. I felt that I'd been sent for, rather than invited.

I had just sat down in the bath when I remembered that a girl called Helen was coming out to lunch with me at the cottage. I had two very handsome-looking steaks in the refrigerator and she was going to grill them for us. I climbed out of the bath, wrapped a towel round me to catch some of the drips, and went to the telephone and rang the Roberts number. Steve's wife answered; she told me that he'd just left the house, to play a few holes of golf with someone who ran an art gallery.

"Damn . . . sorry! The thing is he asked me to drink with you this morning . . ."

"I know."

"And I can't."

"You said you could." She sounded as if she thought I was being difficult.

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"Yes. But I've got someone coming here to lunch. I'd forgotten. I'm awfully sorry . . ."

"Who is it? Can't you bring him?"

"It's a her. I doubt if you know her. A girl called Helen Shaw."

"The red-headed one?"

"No. Not that one."

"Well, bring her with you. Can you do that?"

"I suppose I could. But we'll be a bit later than twelve, I'm afraid."

"Just come as early as you can, then. Is she a nice girl?"

Pretzel was licking my wet legs. I was tempted to tell Steve's wife that Helen had been married seven times and was recently out of Holloway. Instead I said: "Why d'you think I asked her to lunch?"

I thought, as I put the receiver back in its cradle, that Mrs Roberts wouldn't like Helen. Steve's wife was a bit proper—not quite as disgustingly so as Penny Carpenter, but still proper. It was surprising that she'd approved of a girl as attractive as Jane. Perhaps she didn't; perhaps that had been Steve's idea.

I got back into the bath. Pretzel rested his Queen Anne paws on the rim of it and watched me with his huge, brown eyes; now and then he'd push his snout over the edge and take a few laps. It was the taste of the soap he liked.

Helen's old sports car rattled up to the cottage half an hour earlier than I'd expected her. Her arrival delivered me from a tricky passage in a new novel I was working on; it was a difficult section to write and, when I heard the noise of the car and a moment later saw it come bumping up the dirt road and stop under the window where I was working, I was only too happy to shut the loose-leaf and screw the cap back on my pen. I started out to meet her but she came hurrying in as if she thought she

was late, and we met in the doorway and I kissed her.

"You might shut the door first!" She frowned at me, and I noticed that she was wearing a lipstick of a new colour. "Do you want the whole neighbourhood to see?" Nobody was looking, except Pretzel. But, to please her, I shut the door. I told her that we were going to call on the Robertses, and we decided to have a quiet drink on our own first. There was plenty of time. I got the glasses out. "Collins?"

"Perfect. What can I do?"

"You could squeeze two lemons, if you like."

We walked to the Roberts house, and we were there just after twelve. The front door was open, so we went through the house and found them both on the terrace outside the french windows, drinking gin-slugs. I introduced Helen to them, and Steve's wife asked her if she was any relation to an Admiral Shaw who lived about a mile away and kept bantams. Helen said no, she'd never even met an Admiral, only been inspected by one when she was in the Wrens: was he a nice one? The way she asked the question seemed to imply that, if he was, she might consider adding him to her collection.

Steve poured drinks for us and we all sat down. Then his wife caught his eye and stared hard at him as if he'd forgotten to do up his buttons, and he stood up again. "Bill, there's a thing I wanted to show you."

He led me out to his studio, a converted summer-house, but he started talking before we got to it.

"I want to talk to you about young Carpenter. You're a fairly close friend of his, aren't you?" I admitted that. Steve went on: "The other evening he . . . did you see him with Jane Fairley?" I said yes, I had. Steve opened the door of the studio and ushered me in ahead of him. He shut the door, and told me: "He rang me up two days ago and asked me to meet him in the town for lunch. I had some shopping to do anyway, so I didn't mind killing

two birds with one stone. But can you guess why he'd asked me?"

Well, of course I could. I didn't have to guess at all. I looked blankly at Steve. "Why?"

"He wanted me to give him Jane Fairley's telephone number. A long cock-and-bull story about his wife wanting to ask her to tennis."

"Perhaps she does."

"Don't be a fool, Bill. If she did, she'd telephone my wife and ask for it, not have her husband inveigle me into an oyster lunch."

"Oysters, eh?"

Steve looked at me for a moment without saying anything. Then he smiled, patiently. "Look, Bill, I can see the way you're thinking. You're a friend of Ted's and I'm prying into his private life. Look, if you're really a friend of his you'll be on *our* side, you'll do your damndest to stop this . . . this . . ."

"It isn't anything yet, is it?"

"Not so far as I know. But it's dangerous. We're worried about it. After all, we introduced them; we feel responsible."

"Your wife knows about it."

"Yes. She's upset, for Penny's sake. If *she* found out . . ."

"Ah." I nodded. I could imagine all that. Steve glanced at me sharply. "Penny's a *sweet* girl."

I thought: This isn't you talking, old man; it's your wife. You're simply doing her dirty work. But I didn't deny what he said; in fact I nodded. I dare say he was right; perhaps Penny was a sweet girl. I certainly didn't dislike her; I was just terribly glad I wasn't married to her.

I asked Steve: "Well, what can we do about it?"

He shook his head. Poor fellow, he was as lost as I was in this—acting under orders, without conviction. He said:

"Nothing, at the moment. We just wanted to know that you saw the danger of it, that we could count on your help. . . . Look, we'd better go back."

On the way across the lawn he said: "With any luck it'll just blow over. If he doesn't see her, he'll cool off and forget it."

"Perhaps." But I didn't think Ted was going to let anything blow over. He'd taken a risk in broaching the subject to Steve, a silly risk that hadn't paid off except in spreading the fact that he was more than interested in the girl. I was certain that Steve's wife would bring other people into it besides myself. She'd enjoy being the centre of a drama. I was disappointed in Steve; he must have known that he'd achieve nothing by this conversation we'd just had. He should have kept out of it and left it all to her. There was so obviously nothing that outsiders could do; it was up to Ted, and the girl.

Where Steve had really gone wrong had been in telling his wife about it in the first place. Whatever the rights or wrongs of what he was doing, Ted had taken the man into his confidence. It would have been better for everyone if I'd given Ted that tip about the secretarial bureaux.

Not that it took Ted long to find her. About ten days after that lunch-time at the Roberts house, I took Helen to see a French film at a cinema in Sea Point. We went to the early show, because that evening we were going to a dance down at Simonstown.

We came out of the cinema, talking about what we'd seen, and as we went down the steps to the pavement I saw Ted with Jane Fairley. They must have come out ahead of us, because they were a dozen yards ahead, walking towards his car. They got in and drove away without seeing us; Helen hadn't seen them and, even if she had, I doubt if she'd have recognised Ted, whom she'd only met once. I didn't say anything. But in the time—what?

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minute and a half?—that they'd been in sight, I'd seen two of the most obviously happy people I'd ever set eyes on. Not only happy: something about them told me that they knew exactly what they were doing and that they were enjoying every minute of it. Even a stranger, just glancing at them in that crowded street, would have known that they were in love.

I told Ted that I'd seen them. I did it on purpose, in the hope that it'd give him a fright, warn him that in a place the size of Cape Town a man was never unobserved for more than five minutes. I could have told him that before; I'd found it out myself, some time before.

He'd dropped in as he'd used to do—but hadn't for a week or more—for a glass of wine and a chat. I poured out the wine and asked him suddenly, hoping to catch him off-guard: "Enjoy that French film, Ted? In Sea Point?"

His head jerked up and for a brief moment he looked startled. Then he smiled. "I enjoyed it very much, thank you."

That was all. Neither of us mentioned Jane. We talked about ordinary things, which meant, in the main, books, and I told him that I was going away for a long week-end. Some friends who'd bought a hotel on the lagoon at Knysna had asked me to go and stay there for the opening celebrations. I was looking forward to the change of air and to the novel experience of being the guest of the management of a hotel. We talked about that for a bit, had a second glass of wine, and then Ted glanced at his watch—just as he'd always done, only he did it earlier than he'd used to—and said he had to be off.

I really enjoyed those four days. The weather was splendid; the hotel—in the first flush of new ownership, I suppose—extremely comfortable and well run. There was a dance which everyone referred to as a Ball, and several parties were held in the bar, which had been rebuilt inside

to resemble an English pub. I played a lot of darts, and by the time I left I could get the doubles with reasonable ease. My old Citroen stood up well to the journey, suffering no worse injuries than a broken fanbelt, a tyre that blew out and an oil-seal that sprung a leak. I had the oil-seal fixed at a garage in Knysna, and it was no inconvenience because I didn't need the car while I was there. On the return trip she ran like a two-year-old and I had no sort of trouble.

In fact, I got back an hour or two earlier than I'd thought I would. I drove to the Winery first, before I went to the cottage, because I'd left the key there in case of fire or anything of that sort. The Winery was still open, so I went to get the key from Mrs Potgieter in the big cellar (known as the dispensary) where she presided behind a counter of brass-bound barrels. There were two cars parked in the yard and their owners were inside, buying wine. I waited behind them, in the middle of the open space between the polished vats.

Mrs Potgieter was writing out someone's account and adding up the figures. She was a pleasant, comfortable woman, and we'd been friends for a long time. It was she who'd got me the cottage, when the previous tenant had been arrested for fraud or forgery, I forget which. Up to then I'd been in the habit of driving over from my miserably modern flat in Rondebosch about once a week for replenishments of wine. That day she'd handed me my change and asked, casually: "Would you care to stay round here, man?" I had not caught on, at first, to her meaning: the verb 'stay' is used in South Africa when in England we'd say 'live'. She had told me there was a cottage, hardly a bucket's throw from here, that was going begging. She had led me up to see it and before I left with my wine in the boot I'd signed, on the back of a price-list of red wines, a note to the effect that I'd take the cottage at eight pounds a month and sign a proper lease when

they'd drawn one up. They never did draw one, though; the scribble on the back of that wine-list was still our only bond.

Mrs Potgieter finished adding up the account and looked up, pushing it in front of the man who'd already started writing out his cheque. She saw me standing there behind him, but instead of her usual smile an expression of alarm crossed her sunburnt face. She stared at me and opened her mouth and then shut it again; without a word she looked away at the last customer and dealt with him more brusquely than her usually good manners permitted. When we were alone, she put both hands flat down on the barrel-top counter and leant on them, leaning forward and staring at me without speaking. I said: "Good afternoon," and asked her: "Is something . . ."

She shook her head at me. I waited. In her own time, she'd tell me.

She started by asking me with whom I'd left the key and I told her, surprised, that I'd left it here, as she very well knew, and that I'd come now to collect it. She nodded: I had two keys, didn't I? Did I lose one, perhaps?

That shook me. I *did* have two keys, and that girl with red hair had one of them. Then I remembered that she'd given it back to me. It wasn't her. . . . But from that point I remembered more: that about three months ago I'd gone off for a week and had left the spare key with the Carpenters.

Mrs Potgieter, for all her homely appearance, was no fool. She saw the expression on my face—I suppose a sudden awareness of what all this had to be about. So she didn't say much more. She pulled out a drawer behind her and handed me my key. She said: "You'd better get the other one back, man. And next time, give me both, ay?" I nodded, and wished her good night. She nodded back, and told me: "I didn't go in."

The phrase ran through my mind as I jumped into the

car and turned her in the rutted yard. From here I had to drive down the Winery's road to the tarmac and along it and up again on to my own track. All the way I was hearing that flat statement—*I didn't go in.* . . .

And it was just as well she hadn't. Not just that they hadn't tidied the place, that they'd left glasses on the table and dirty plates in the sink. Not just that they hadn't made the bed. . . . They'd left in a hurry. Perhaps at Mrs Potgieter's appearance.

I am not normally given to violent displays of anger, but my hand was unsteady as I lifted the receiver and dialled Ted Carpenter's office number. When he came on the line and heard my voice he sounded as much shocked as surprised, and he told me rather shakily that he hadn't expected me back until much later. I ignored that. I told him—there was no question of asking—to leave his office immediately and come straight to the cottage. He hesitated and began to raise some objection, and I cut him short by asking if he'd prefer me to ask his wife to come down. I hung up, not waiting for any answer.

I went out to the car for my suitcase and set it down against the wall of the sitting-room. I couldn't unpack until the place had been cleaned, but it was getting cold, now that the sun was on its way down, so I cleared out the grate and laid a new fire and lit it. I had to chop the kindling and, by the time the fire was going properly, I heard Ted's car stop outside. When I stood up and turned round he was standing in the doorway. He must have broken all the speed laws to get here so quickly. He said quickly: "Bill. I'm terribly sorry, you must think I'm a . . ."

"Yes. Yes, Ted, I do."

He shook his head as if to clear it and told me: "It was late when that woman came and banged on the window. It was awful, Bill. I had to get her home fast and then get home myself. I'd . . . forgotten the time, I . . . I thought

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you'd be back late tonight or even in the morning, so I was going to stop here and tidy up on my way home. . . ."

I didn't say anything. He went on: "I know it must seem . . ."

"It doesn't *seem*. It *is*."

"Bill, I told you I was sorry."

His eyes flickered down to my right hand and I realised that I was still holding the coal tongs. I dropped them; they bounced and clanged on the stone floor.

"You can clear up, now. Change the sheets on the bed; you'll find clean ones in that cupboard." I pointed at the tongs lying at his feet. "You'll need those."

He started as if I'd struck him, and his face went as white as the wall. He looked sick. Well, if I looked the way I was feeling, that made two of us. I told him: "I'll be back in about forty minutes. I'd be grateful if you'd finish and be away before that."

Without looking at him again, I walked past him and out to the Citroen. I had to go to the kennels to fetch Pretzel.

Much as I'd have liked to have been able to avoid them, I couldn't help seeing the Carpenters from time to time. If I'd kept away from them, or not behaved as I always had towards them, Penny would have wondered why and probably found out. It seemed to me that she'd have to find out one day, but for the time being she seemed to have no inkling of what was going on; in fact, she made it plain that she was completely in the dark by referring, at a cocktail party, to "that rather striking girl who Ted flirted with at the Roberts's party". She teased Ted about it as if it had been a momentary lapse, and it was obvious to anyone that she'd no idea that he'd even seen her since that day.

I didn't discuss the affair again with Ted. That night when I came back to the cottage with Pretzel, he'd cleared

the place up and left; and I had a sleepless night disliking the way I'd humiliated him. I couldn't have felt much more guilty if I'd committed murder; I'd killed my own self-respect in the process of destroying any pride he might have had. I don't know how anyone else would have reacted in those circumstances, but it worried me like a bad pain; half-way between waking and sleeping the scene and the words kept going through and through my mind like a nightmare. I'd have liked to have obliterated the memory of it, even to have apologised to him; but I couldn't do that and, even if I had, it wouldn't have changed anything. There was no doubt that he hated me; I could see it in his eyes when nobody else was looking and we were trapped face to face at some party, or met by accident in the street.

He was still meeting Jane; Steve Roberts told me that he'd seen them together at a drive-in snack place on the way down to Fishoek. That meant, of course, that Steve's wife, and all her friends, would know about it, too. How Penny could go on for so long—it was months, now—in complete ignorance, without even a suspicion of it, was difficult to understand. If she did have any suspicions, they certainly didn't show; to see her take Ted's arm, and him smiling down at her as if he shared that quiet and rather sloppy affection which she obviously had for him, gave me a sensation of acute discomfort.

In fact it was so unpleasant to have this knowledge, and to have to pretend, in Penny's presence, that everything was fine and the same as it had always been, that I even thought of giving up the cottage and moving back to some flat near the town. But I was too fond of the cottage and the relaxed, secluded life it allowed me; besides, I couldn't take Pretzel to live in a flat.

One day—it was in the middle of the week—Penny rang me up. She said she wanted to ask a favour, wanted me to do something for her which I wouldn't like but which

would "get her out of an awful fix". I dislike this sort of preamble, so I interrupted it and asked her to tell me what it was she wanted. She said that Ted's firm were sending him to Johannesburg on business. He had to be there for two or three working days and also spend a week-end making himself socially pleasant to the head of some large manufacturing concern. If he could get this fellow's advertising it would mean a great deal to Ted's firm, and therefore to Ted personally as well, and Penny was very happy that they'd given the job to him. She went on to say that she'd always known he'd do well, and it was really too marvel . . .

I interrupted again. I mentioned that I was in the middle of some rather tricky work, so could she please tell me what it was she wanted me to do.

It turned out that she'd arranged a tennis party for this coming Saturday, and now Ted would be away. She really had to have a man there to look after drinks and that sort of thing, and would I stand in for Ted?

I told her that I would. I wanted to get on with my work, and to agree was the easiest way to end the conversation. But it didn't stop Penny. She went straight on to the next stage of the request, which was would I play, as well, otherwise they'd be one short. I agreed to that, too, only reminding her that I was about as dexterous with a tennis racket as I was with spaghetti, and making it clear that I was accepting for this one occasion only and that it could not on any account be taken as a precedent should similar difficulties arise in the future.

Penny accepted these reservations and expressed her relief and gratitude. I said good-bye to her and went back to my book.

I was absorbed in it, pleased with the way it was going and enjoying the act of writing it, the physical act of putting it down on paper. It was one of those rare stories which catch hold of the man who is writing them to the

extent that he truly believes in his characters and their actions, so, that they develop on their own until the writer feels more like a middleman, a medium, translating into words an atmosphere and a story which was there to start with—as though he *found* it instead of inventing it. Only a writer can know the thrill, the real exhilaration, of having a story come to life under his hands: it happens suddenly and unexpectedly; sometimes it changes the original plot and very often it leads to a new and inevitable ending which was never in the writer's mind when he started.

It had happened to this story that I was working on, and in accepting Penny Carpenter's invitation I had only been disposing of an unwelcome interruption in the quickest possible way. It wasn't until I'd finished my night's work and was sipping a nightcap at two in the morning that I realised what I'd let myself in for.

Saturday came, and it was as dreary an afternoon as I'd known it would be. I suppose we all of us have our private ideas of Heaven and Hell: well, Hell, to me, has no fire or brimstone about it. In my Hell, there are none of the interesting people who are said to frequent the place. My Hell—and I had a preview of it that Saturday afternoon—is to be dressed up in clean, white clothes, to have to prance about after a small, bouncing ball under the critical eyes of half a dozen frumpy women, and in between the ball sessions to have to make light conversation with those same women, who by this time are red in the face and slightly sweaty. To hand them cups of tea and plates of cucumber sandwiches, and at the same time, smile. . . . Ted, who must have had to endure this often, had all my sympathy, that afternoon.

Which brings me back to the story that I started out to tell. The whole point of it is that Penny Carpenter played too many sets of tennis, became over-hot and exhausted, and, resting in between sets, sat in the shade when a cool

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breeze was coming up, and neglected to put a cardigan round her shoulders. She looked pale and shivery by the time play finished, and when we were having drinks inside the house just before going home her eyes were feverish and she was complaining of the heat and opening windows when most other people were cold. The women made a fuss over her and she promised to drink a hot toddy and go straight to bed, and several of them said they'd call in the morning to see how she was. Penny told them all not to make such a ballyhoo; she was quite all right, she said, just a bit tired, and she thought she might have a cold coming on.

I helped her put things away, and I gave Steve Roberts's wife a lift home. On the way she told me that she "didn't like the look of Penny at all", and that she wished Ted were here to look after her. I said: well, he'd be back on Monday, and that was only the day after tomorrow. At this she looked at me sideways and asked me if I really thought he'd gone to Johannesburg on his firm's business? I answered that I'd no reason to think anything else. She sniffed; that's all she had time for because by that time I was stopping the car in their drive and Steve was coming out of the front door to meet us. He asked me if I'd come in and have a drink, but I couldn't. I was looking forward to a bath, and I was taking Helen out to dinner that evening.

On Sunday morning Steve Roberts called in to see me. He'd walked from the Carpenters' house, where he'd left his car. Penny was seriously ill. There was a doctor up there and Steve's wife had moved in to act as nurse. Penny had a temperature of a hundred and four and the doctor had said that he'd have moved her to hospital but didn't want to unless he could get that temperature down a bit first. He was giving her drugs and injections and he'd said that her husband ought to get back in double-quick time. Penny was delirious and couldn't answer questions

or talk sense, so Steve had come to ask me how we could get in touch with Ted.

I looked in the telephone book, and the advertising agency's director had his home number listed under the office ones. I dialled the number and when eventually I got through to him I told him that there was an emergency and we had to get hold of Ted Carpenter quickly. The man seemed puzzled by what I'd said, and he asked me why I didn't telephone Carpenter at his home in Constantia. It was in the book, wasn't it?

"But you've sent him to Johannesburg, haven't you?"

"*I've sent him where?*"

The truth of it was pretty obvious by this time. I apologised for my mistake, told him that obviously I'd been misinformed and was sorry to have bothered him. As I put the receiver down, Steve muttered dourly: "*Now the balloon goes up!*"

I shook my head. "Steve, Jane Fairley was sharing her flat with another girl, wasn't she?" He nodded, and I asked him: "Have you got their telephone number?"

He had, at home. We got into my car and drove down to his house, and he found the number in an address book in his wife's desk. He pointed to the telephone and I dialled the number.

A girl answered and I asked for Mrs Fairley. She hesitated, then told me: "I'm afraid she isn't here."

"She's away for the week-end?"

"Yes. But . . ."

"It's terribly urgent. Could you tell me where I can get her?"

Again she dithered. I decided to take a risk; if I didn't say any more than I had, she'd probably think I was a private detective, or a jealous boy-friend, and refuse to help.

"I'm a friend of Ted Carpenter's. My name's Swanson."

"Oh! Jane's mentioned you." Well, that was encouraging.

"Ted's wife is ill. It's serious, and the doctor wanted to get him back from Johannesburg. I phoned the man who runs his firm, and . . . well, Ted isn't in Johannesburg. Not on business, anyway. So I thought that . . . that Jane might know where he *is*."

She took the cue well. "I suppose Jane *might* know. You could ring her at the High Noon Hotel, near Somerset West." I thanked her, and she said: "I hope I'm doing the right thing . . ."

"You are. Don't worry." I thanked her again, and hung up. This meant a delay; Somerset West is only thirty miles from Cape Town, but it's a trunk call and a busy line. After five minutes' ringing, I got the operator, and gave her the number.

"We'll ring you back." I asked her how long it'd take, and her answer was: "I can't say."

Steve and I had a drink while we waited. After about twenty minutes the telephone rang and I grabbed it quickly.

"Your call to Somerset West." The hotel came on the line and I asked for Mrs Fairley. I knew it'd be useless to ask for Mr Carpenter, because, clumsy as he was, he'd hardly have booked in under his own name. My bet was it'd be Mr and Mrs Fairley.

It was Ted who came to the telephone. "Mrs Fairley's busy, at the moment. Can she ring you back?"

"No, Ted. It was you I wanted. Bill, here." There was a moment's pause and I heard him draw in his breath sharply. Then his voice exploded at me out of the telephone.

"What the devil d'you . . ."

"Ted, wait a minute. Listen. I got your number from the girl Jane lives with. As far as anyone else is concerned, you're still in Johannesburg. But Penny's seriously

ill and the doctor told us to get you home. D'you understand?"

"Ill? Penny?"

"Yes. She got a chill playing tennis and now she's a lot worse. It's serious, Ted. Get home as fast as you can and say you got a chance seat in some special flight. Damn it, I don't care *what* you say: just get home!"

I rang off. Steve and I had another drink while we worked out that we'd tell the doctor, or anyone else, that I'd known where Ted was in Johannesburg and that I'd got straight through to him earlier in the morning, without any delay on the line, and that he'd left immediately for the airport.

That was what we'd say if they asked. If they didn't, all we need tell them was that he was on his way. That was all that mattered, and they probably wouldn't go into it too deeply. They'd simply be glad we'd got hold of him. I suggested gently to Steve that there was no reason for his wife to know all about it, and to my surprise he agreed.

It was lunch-time. Steve's wife would be having a snack up at the Carpenters' house, if she ate at all; so I took him back to my cottage where we fried sausages and opened a can of baked beans. Steve told me it was the best meal he'd had since he left the Army.

Early in the afternoon we drove up to the Carpenters', and when we got there I left Pretzel shut in the Citroen, because if he'd got out he'd have started knocking those two dogs of Ted's about again. I'd had to bring him, because if I'd left him at the cottage he'd have followed the car anyway.

The house was dead-quiet. Steve tiptoed upstairs and I heard him on the landing whispering his wife's name. A door opened and closed so gently that I could only just hear it, and there was an exchange of whispers; then the door opened and shut again and Steve came back down the

stairs. He told me quietly: "She's worse. It's very bad indeed." He moved off towards the front door, jerking his head at me, meaning that I should go with him. But I let him creep out on his own; I went down the passage to Ted's study and sat down by myself. I didn't need any details from Steve: I knew what was going to happen. And I wanted to see Ted when he arrived; so I sat at the window, at his desk, and waited for him.

After a while I saw Steve drive off. Then I think I dozed off; at any rate I don't remember the act of waiting, only the fact of Ted's arrival. He came up the drive at about fifty miles an hour, and I went quickly out to the hall and met him there as he came in, running. He stared at me, through me, as if I was a ghost, and went past, heading for the stairs. I stopped him: "Ted. Wait . . ."

He paused, one foot on the bottom stair, and twisted round to look back at me over his shoulder.

"Ted, nobody knows where you were. Only me and Steve Roberts. Nobody else. You may think it doesn't matter now, but for God's sake, don't let them guess."

You see, I was worried that in the stress of what was going to happen he'd break down and blurt it all out. Heaven knows, I wasn't the guardian of his secrets or of his reputation; at that moment I wasn't thinking of him, I was thinking of Penny. A week ago, a month ago, I was embarrassed by her *not* knowing; now, at this moment, it was vital that she shouldn't.

Ted nodded, doubtfully, as if he understood my words but not my meaning. He nodded, then he turned and ran up the stairs. I went back into his study, and waited.

It must have been an hour or more before he came in. He didn't seem surprised to find me there; he went straight to a wall cupboard, took out a decanter of brandy and two glasses, half-filled them both and handed one to me. And at that moment the telephone rang.

Ted stared at it. I made a move to answer it for him, but he shook his head and leaned over to snatch up the receiver.

"Carpenter here." A woman's voice spoke thinly out of the instrument and Ted, holding it to his ear, closed his eyes as if they hurt him.

"Jane!" That was all he said. I noticed that he was swaying on his feet and that there were drops of sweat on his forehead. I heard her voice again, I suppose louder in anxiety and quite audible even from where I stood.

"Ted . . . tell me . . ."

He told her, in two words. He said: "Penny's dead." Then he put down the receiver and picked up his glass and drank about three inches of brandy in one swallow. He put the glass down carefully beside the telephone and turned to face me. "She didn't know, Bill. I held her hand and she smiled at me . . . trusting. . . ."

The word seemed to stick in his throat. He slid into a chair and leant forward, resting his head in his hands. I sat down opposite him. I couldn't drink neat brandy quite as fast as Ted had. I sipped mine slowly and waited for him to speak, or at least to move. But he didn't. When my glass was empty I put it down on the table beside the other one; he didn't move or look up at the sound of it, so I left him there and shut the door behind me as quietly as I could.

In the hall I met the doctor and Steve and Steve's wife. She was crying and Steve had his arm round her. He asked me: "Is Ted . . ."

I told him: "He's in his study. If I were you, I'd leave him alone." The doctor nodded.

I went out on to the front steps: the sun was nearly down and the air had cooled. I was standing there when the telephone began to ring again, inside the house.

I walked slowly across the driveway to my car, and as I opened the door I saw Pretzel. I'd forgotten all about

him; he was stretched out along the whole length of the back seat, and all he did was to open one eye and thump the leather a few times with his tail. He liked cars.

The telephone was still ringing as I drove away.

Ted didn't see Jane again. A few days after Penny's death she left the Cape—for Johannesburg, Steve said. He said, too, that the reason for her leaving was that Ted had refused to see her.

Ted sold his house, gave up his advertising job, and took a flat just above the town. None of us who'd known him before saw anything of him, except by accident: he refused invitations and after a time people stopped trying. When he appeared in public, for months after Penny died, he was invariably alone; but later he seemed to have found a new circle of friends, mainly newspaper and publishing people, and he started doing part-time work, away from the Cape for months on end, for his own publisher, Jimmy Townsend.

I knew some of these new friends of his, and Townsend I knew very well. I gathered that Ted had come gradually out of his hermit's shell and that, although he was still sometimes moody and always much quieter than he had been before, he was leading a normal life and seemed, so far as anyone could tell, happy.

He had no girl-friends. One would hardly have expected him to, at first, but even . . . oh, long after Penny's death and certainly after most people had forgotten that Jane Fairley even existed, nobody ever saw him talking to a woman.

Townsend told me that Ted didn't even glance at them in the street. That was supposed to be a joke, an exaggeration, but in all seriousness I would stake my word that Ted Carpenter had nothing to do with any woman from the day his wife died until the day, three years later, when he saw Jane, by chance, on the race-course at Salisbury.

TED'S STORY-III

PEOPLE STARED CURIOUSLY AT ME as I ran, forcing my way through the crowd, dodging in and out; I suppose excitement or desperation or both showed in my face. Somebody shouted "What's the bloody hurry?" and another growled angrily in my ear "Clumsy idiot!"

But when I got to where she'd been, roughly where she'd been, there was no sign of her. I hunted around in the crowd, frightened almost to a state of panic that if I didn't find her now perhaps I never would. There was another fear, too—that I'd seen some girl who looked like Jane, and that my imagination had done the rest.

Look, I can't explain it, only try to describe it. I'd cut myself away from her three years before. At the time I was in such an emotional state that I hardly knew what I was doing. Hardly? Damn it, I *didn't* know! Everything was upside down and . . . well, it was so confused that I can't remember one day from another, or any one day at all, of that time. What I do know is that it was weeks later when I began to realise what I'd done. I started to dream of Jane, then, every time I slept. Dream we were together, with that wild, clear happiness that we always had when we *were* together; then I'd wake, to find that it wasn't true, that I'd turned it into a lie when I'd driven her away. All I could feel for myself then was dislike and contempt.

It was much too late to do anything about it; I loved her, but only I knew that. I'd treated her as if I hated her, I'd behaved like a madman, and now, as a result, I was

alone. Not lonely, in the general sense; only in knowing that Jane was all I wanted and that after the way I'd behaved I might as well go out and howl at the moon as try to get her back.

I think that at the time, I mean after Penny died, I was suffering from shock and slightly unbalanced. The way she'd died, the physical moment of it, she holding my hand and smiling at me as if we still had everything in common including love; and my intention, which I'd discussed with Jane during the week-end, to tell her that I wanted her to divorce me. . . . You see, even if she'd recovered, I'd have told her that. Her death was an accident and had nothing to do with my relationship with Jane. I'm not saying that this relationship could be justified in itself, only that it was not responsible for what happened to Penny. There was simply no connection between the two, and I was ashamed that I'd succumbed so completely to the emotion of that moment. As far as Jane was concerned, I'd known all along what I was doing and where it would bring us: it wasn't just an 'affair'; it meant more to me than anything ever had in my life and there'd never been any doubt that one day it would have to be brought out into the open and faced and acknowledged, and Penny told.

In surrendering to an illogical, emotional upheaval I'd betrayed the thing there'd been between me and Jane—destroyed not only our relationship, which made hurt enough in itself, but more than that, denounced an ideal in which I believed. And, in the act, deprived myself of Jane.

Well, as I've said, it hurt. To describe it more fully I could say that it was a prolonged torture. But it was a situation of my own making and I had had time to see the results of emotional weakness; I was determined not to make the same error twice. I set out, deliberately, to kick myself clear of the wreckage. I worked hard, met new people, I did jobs for Jimmy Townsend not so much for the pay as for the fact that the jobs filled my time and took

me to new places. . . . I saw to it that when I went to bed I was either dog-tired or drunk enough to sleep soundly, without dreams.

After a time, it began to work. I can't say I forgot Jane: but it became as if she, and not Penny, had died. I thought of her often enough, but as someone from a separate existence to which there was no return or access.

Quite an achievement! At least, I'd thought of it as that. But when I caught that glimpse of her, that flash of lips and eyes and hair, in the anonymous crowd, the unfamiliar place, in that second of seeing Jane I knew that I'd achieved nothing, changed nothing. It was as if I'd spent three years asleep, and woken from a dream of incredible dullness to a reality of ecstasy.

I think I must have stared into every face in that enclosure before I gave up the search. There was only one explanation—that right at the moment I'd seen her, she (and the man with her) had left directly for one of the exits, most likely into the car park. It was too late to look there, because I'd been hunting for ten minutes or more, perhaps twenty, and if that was the way they'd gone they'd have driven off by now.

I walked slowly back towards where I'd left Harry and Victoria. As I went, I thought about that look on Jane's face. I'd seen it before, once. In the cottage, in Constantia, when the old woman from the wine place had come snooping round and stared at us through the window with her mouth open. . . .

It struck me that Jane might have seen me a second before I saw her. That would have accounted for her expression, and it made sense for her hurried departure. It seemed more than possible, and yet I didn't believe that it had happened like that. First, because if she had seen me, surely there'd have been some way that I'd have known it—a quick glance back, for instance. You can usually

know whether someone has cut you on purpose or simply not seen you; I learnt the difference in Cape Town, three years ago. Second, I had an impression that she'd been looking at the man beside her, and that, if either of them had been talking, it had been he. If she'd seen me and wanted to leave quickly for that reason, surely it would have been the other way about? The third point is that Jane wouldn't have run away, even if she *had* seen me. There'd have been no need: she could have faced me and then had nothing, or as little as she wanted, to do with me after the meeting, and her curiosity, any woman's curiosity, would have urged her to have a word with a lover she hadn't seen in three years, even if he happened to have behaved, three years ago, in a particularly boorish manner.

As I walked slowly back through the crowd, not bothering to look at people now, I was thinking about Jane, trying to recapture in the photographic department of my mind that sudden glimpse of her. At this time I gave no thought at all to the man who'd been with her; there had to be a man, or men, with Jane—she'd have looked strange without at least one somewhere close. I think that more or less subconsciously I'd dismissed him, knowing that the first and all-important thing was to find her and that only after I'd found her would there be any point in studying the complications. Essentials are best dealt with one at a time and in order of priority.

A hand grasped my shoulder and interrupted my thoughts. I stopped and looked up to find Harry Clewes grinning at me.

"Turned you down, eh?" I looked from him to Victoria and he said to her: "Must have been Jane Russell. No other Jane could have given him that kind of jolt. Look at him!"

Victoria *was* looking at me: seriously, almost analytically. She nodded, slowly. "You look quite different, Ted. You didn't find her, did you?"

I shook my head. They waited for me to say something and, when they saw I wasn't going to, Victoria sighed: "Come on, then. Let's be off." We set off through the thinning crowd, in the direction of the car park. If Jane had been anywhere in the enclosure now, I'd have seen her. She wasn't.

Harry groped around in his pocket and brought out a thick wad of bank-notes. He handed it to me. "Your earnings." I'd forgotten about the race and my horse winning with a drunk in its saddle. I took the money and put it in my jacket pocket and asked him how much it was. He laughed. "Guess."

I felt it, and it was hard to tell. "Thirty pounds?"

"A few bob short of fifty. You got ninety-nine to one, as near as dammit. Satisfied?"

Victoria looked across at me in that same, interested way. She said: "He can't even smile."

I'd been thinking, and it had just occurred to me that this money might be useful. I had to find Jane, and I wouldn't do that by sitting in a hotel room or by driving out of Salisbury at first light the next morning, which was what I'd planned to do. I asked Harry: "Which is the bar most people would go to for a drink after the races?"

Harry had a quick answer. "The home bar. Come along to our shack."

I shook my head. I wouldn't find Jane *there*, either. "When I've just won fifty pounds for nothing? Not on your lives. We'll go and have something to quench our thirsts, now, and then you two go home and change and I'm taking you out to dinner. . . . Well?"

Victoria smiled. "You . . . I can read you like a book, Ted."

"Will you come?"

Harry glanced at his wife. She told me: "On a condition."

"Anything."

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"That during the evening you'll tell me about this Jane of yours."

I only hesitated for a moment. "All right."

"*All* about her?"

Crossing my fingers, I told her: "All." She smiled up at Harry.

"Then we *will* have dinner with him, won't we?"

We had a drink together in the cocktail bar at my hotel and arranged to meet in the same place at a quarter to eight. Harry and Victoria went off home then, and I went up to my room; while the bath was running I telephoned the 'Auberge Bleu' and booked a table for dinner.

I had time to waste, too much time. I didn't want to go downstairs early and have too many drinks before the Cleweses arrived. Perhaps it reveals some weakness of character, but I've never yet been able to hang around in licensed premises without buying a drink; nor, for that matter, have I found it possible to sit with a glass beside me and simply watch the ice melt.

I lay in the bath and let my mind and memory run on Jane. It was so easy to do; for a long time I'd deliberately restrained such thoughts, and they were all there, in storage but quite free of dust, ready to rush out at the turning of the key. . . . The bath cooled, so I sat up and let in some more hot water; too much, it made me feel slightly sick, so I got out and dried and dressed. I wondered if it was the hot water or the excitement that had made me dizzy, speeded up my pulse-rate.

There was no doubt in my mind that I'd find her. In a way, this was reasonable, because Salisbury is a small town and sooner or later a man would see anyone he knew, in one place or another. But it was over-confident to expect to find her that evening; after all, she didn't have to be dining out, or drinking in one of the cocktail bars. She might be spending the evening at home, wherever

she was living: she might be going to some private party, or a cinema.'

I'd forgotten to go slowly, and now I was dressed and it was still too early. But I couldn't just sit there in my room, nor keep pacing across it, smoking, looking at my watch every other minute. I tried to discipline my impatience, curb the restlessness; I sat down, and picked up the morning paper. Then it struck me that while I sat here, marking time, Jane might drop in to the cocktail bar downstairs, just here under my feet, and leave again while I still sat studying the morning's news. . . .

I jumped up, and ran out of the room and down the stairs; a moment later I was trying to wedge myself into the pack around the bar.

The crowd there was about four deep, mostly men waiting to get drinks from the hard-pressed bartender, and one or two groups standing among them to make things more difficult; but a gap showed suddenly to my right, and as I moved into it a man with an RAF moustache and a Gunners' tie prised himself off the end stool. I took his place; it was a good one, because, being in the corner at the end of the bar, I could sit sideways with my back to the wall and look into the room over the heads of the people near me.

All the wall seats and the little stools at tables were occupied. There was still, I noticed, a shortage of women in Rhodesia. I remembered on previous visits sitting out in the hotel lounge at lunch-time on a Sunday, and watching parties of people arrive for their morning drinks. A woman would appear first in the doorway, and about seventy-five per cent of the men in that big, crowded room would turn and look at her. She'd walk in, and there'd be a man close behind her, breathing down her neck. Behind him there'd be another man, and then another three or four behind him. Six to one was a normal composition for such groups. They'd find a table and sit down, and the

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woman would raise an unlighted cigarette to her lips; four lighters and two matches would flare simultaneously around her. It reminded me of the Wrens in Colombo, in nineteen forty-four.

The bartender glanced at me, raising his eyebrows, so I ordered a dry Martini. I didn't really want a drink at all, so I thought I'd get this little one and sip it until the Cleweses arrived. I kept an eye on the glass entrance and people filtered in and out of it, but none of them looked anything like Jane. Suddenly it struck me that she *couldn't* walk in through that doorway; it was a hopeless thing to ask for, like waiting to win the Irish Sweep. I knew that entrance, I'd trodden its carpet a hundred times; how could *Jane* appear in it?

"Same again, sir?" If I'd been wanting a drink, I'd have had to wait twenty minutes. Since I didn't, here was this chap practically forcing it down my throat. I thought: What about all these other people, with their tongues lolling and their eyes standing out trying to catch yours? Why pick on me? But I nodded, weakly, and he took my glass and filled it, and this time I had to change a note.

Then some more people appeared in the doorway, and I glanced at the girl but it wasn't Jane, so I looked away again, thinking: *She won't come*. I sipped the new Martini; before I'd put the glass down there was a stir in the crowd at my elbow and this was Victoria Clewes asking primly: "Mister Carpenter, I presume?"

"Victoria! How on earth . . ." There was only one door, and I'd been watching it.

"You stared at me rather rudely, and then looked away, which was even ruder." Harry took over from her, pointing at my glass.

"How many of those have you had?"

I gave Victoria my stool—it was a tight squeeze in this pack, getting down and helping her up—and Harry and I stood on either side of her. It took me about five minutes

to get the barman's eye and then another five before he had time to attend to us. I ordered drinks. I had to keep looking round behind me, in case Jane should have come in while I'd been glaring at the barman. Victoria asked me: "Were you expecting someone else, Ted?"

"Sorry. Must seem . . ."

"*Were* you?"

I looked at her. "Not *expecting*." We had our drinks by this time. "Cheers . . . Harry, this place is too crowded for comfort. Let's drink these up and move on."

"Where to?"

"Doesn't really matter." There were about five decent bars in Salisbury that I knew of. I mean, the sort of bars that one might hope to find a woman like Jane—or Victoria—in. I dare say there are more now, it's a growing town. I suggested to Harry: "Might be more room at the 'Milroy'."

Victoria asked me: "Are we dining there?" I told her that I'd booked at the 'Auberge Bleu'. She glanced at Harry, then back at me. "Are we going to visit every pub in town before we eat?"

It was a straight question and I gave it the honest answer: "Yes." I suppose the monosyllable sounded a bit challenging, as if I was prepared to defend the intention. Victoria laughed and patted my arm.

"All right, Ted. We don't mind a pub crawl, so long as you remember your promise." I remembered, all right; I had to invent some twaddle about Jane. After a few more Martinis, it wouldn't be difficult.

The next place we went to was rather more crowded than the first. We could hardly get in the door, let alone to the bar. And Jane wasn't there. She wasn't the sort of woman who could hide in a crowd; if she'd been in it I'd have seen her. We had an uncomfortable drink and moved on. In the third bar, which was slightly less full (by this time people were going off to find food), we got entangled

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with a bunch of people whom Harry knew—racing people, I gathered. I don't think Victoria liked them very much. There were four men and five women, and they asked us to join them. Harry looked as if he liked the idea, but Victoria, bless her, saved the situation by saying that we had a table booked and that we hoped someone else would be joining us later on; we really couldn't, although it was extremely kind of them to ask us. . . . At the same time, she kicked Harry hard on his shin, so that he jumped and slopped his whisky.

"Of course," he muttered. "I'd forgotten."

But we had to stay and drink with them for a bit. Harry introduced me as the man who'd scooped ninety-nine to one on the tote, and their reactions made it pretty obvious that I was expected to buy them all drinks. I was on edge, conscious of time passing, time wasting. Jane was somewhere in this town. One of the party—I think she must have been the odd woman out—asked me what I was doing in Salisbury, was I writing a book about the place? So Harry'd told them that, too: blast him. I told the girl that I was just passing through, on my way up to East Africa by road. One of the men, I think he was a trainer, asked me which way I was going: through Kapiri Mposhi?

As a matter of fact this was what I'd planned. It was the normal and the quicker route and although I'd have liked to see more of Nyasaland than I had, I'd heard that the roads were about as bad as they could be. But it struck me from the way he'd asked the question that if I said, yes, I was going through Lusaka, he'd have something to suggest: friends of his to look up on the way, something of that sort. So I shook my head and told him that I was going via Blantyre.

All of them advised me strongly against this. The road was perhaps passable, they said, but not worth the wear and tear on my car and the mortification of having to turn back. It simply wasn't worth the attempt. There were

huge boulders in the middle of it and the surface was never graded. It was a death-trap and only a tank or an elephant had much hope of getting through. Harry and Victoria concurred in this; I ought to go up the Great North Road, and be sensible. I told them that this was what I intended: I was going to drive up through Nyasaland and join the Great North Road above Fort Hill. They gave me up as a bad job and I paid for the drinks.

We got away from them soon after that. On the way to the next halt, Victoria came back to the subject of my route. She said that I really should think over what those people had said since everyone knew how frightful that Nyasaland road was. I explained to her that I'd misled them and that I'd no intention of taking any road except the usual one, through Lusaka and Kapiri Mposhi. I hoped to make Mpika for the first night out of Salisbury, which would put me well on the way. Whatever the Nyasaland road was like, this would be a great deal quicker. I explained why I'd told them the other way about, and Harry chuckled. "You were dead-right. That crook comes from Lusaka. His family's still there."

Jane wasn't in the next bar, either. We'd tried all the likely places, now, and Victoria was getting hungry. The 'Auberge Bleu' was our last hope—mine, I mean. So we had one drink, and got back into Harry's car. Victoria asked me: "Can we relax, now?"

I told her: "If they haven't given our table away." It was nine-thirty and I'd booked it for nine.

They *had* given it away. But there'd be another one free in ten to fifteen minutes' time. While the head waiter (he seemed to be the head waiter) was telling me this I was looking round the room, at the tables and at the couples on the dance floor. Jane wasn't among them. Suddenly I realised the futility of this search: agog with expectancy I'd dragged the Cleweses from bar to bar, and it had all been quite pointless, hopeless, from start to finish. Finish was

now; they'd had an uncomfortable evening, and I'd been behaving like an over-eager adolescent. The enthusiasm had gone, and now I was flat, depressed, and, for all the Martinis, cold sober. It seemed to me that I had very little hope of finding Jane at all; I had a job to do, and I couldn't hang around Salisbury for more than a day or two.

But at the moment this was my party. My own change of mood wasn't going to wreck the rest of the evening for the Cleweses. I'd led them over a sort of obstacle race for the last two hours; better, now, to forget the object of this abortive operation, and try, or pretend, to enjoy the party.

I told the head waiter that we'd wait at the bar and order our dinner while we were waiting. We found an empty wall seat under the circular window and ordered more drinks, and they gave us a sheaf of menus.

It was all very pleasant except that there was no point to it—Victoria, I knew, could sense my depression, but Harry was cheerfully above it. He said that the roast pheasant here was splendid: I couldn't find any mention of it on the elaborate menu, but the waiter said he could produce it. Harry'd been pleased about that: now he said, Damn it, he'd won the double, why couldn't he buy the wine? I didn't know why he couldn't, so he became even happier and ordered Dry Monopole. He'd probably been worried that I'd send for some South African fermentation. Harry was a bit of a snob about wines.

Then we were waiting for the table to be ready, making our drinks last because we didn't want to get tight. Conversation lagged, so Victoria came up with another reminder that I hadn't yet told them about "this girl, Jane".

The head waiter saved me by coming to tell us that our table was ready. The Cleweses seemed delighted and I tried to whip up a suitable enthusiasm in my own expression. But I wasn't at all enthusiastic, or even hungry; I'd sooner have been back in my hotel, reading a book in

bed. I was fond of Harry and Victoria, and normally I enjoyed being with them: but I'd seen Jane, that afternoon, and now there was nothing *except* Jane. The only good thing about the table being ready was that the sooner we started, the sooner we'd finish.

We had a fish thing—crayfish, or shrimps, so far as I remember—to start with. I danced with Victoria and, when we sat down, an African in a red fez was showing the bottle to Harry; Harry nodded, satisfied, but at that moment the head waiter rushed up and took the bottle out of the African's hands and showed it to Harry again. Harry smiled at it, and remarked that it wasn't every day a man won the double. When the wine was poured, Victoria raised her glass and smiled at me across the table.

"To Jane," she said. Harry echoed the words, then frowned at her and asked who on earth did she mean, *Jane*? Victoria sighed. "That's what Ted is going to tell us about, darling. He brought us here just for that. . . . Tell us *now*, Ted. Who *is* Jane?"

I managed to glance at Victoria, but only for a moment: then I looked back, over her right shoulder, at the other side of the room. I told her quietly, trying to keep my voice level:

"See for yourself. Over there; just come in. *That's* Jane."

TED'S STORY-IV

SHE HADN'T LOOKED AT ANYONE in the room. Just came in beside the smallish fat man—the same one, I thought, who'd been with her on the race-course that afternoon—and I only turned to look that way myself because I'd seen several other men glance that way and go on looking: I looked too and there was Jane, Jane who belonged to me or at any rate used to and was going to again; she was wearing a green silk dress that matched her eyes and set off the colour of her hair so that it burned as if there was a great golden light flaming behind it. There was something glowing in me, too, an ember growing brighter in my mind and an almost physical pressure in my chest as I looked at her, watched her as the head waiter bustled up to the fat man and spoke to him with his eyes constantly flicking back to Jane as if he couldn't keep them still. Then they were moving away from the door behind the waiter, towards a small table which was the only empty one in the room.

Like atmospherics spoiling reception came Victoria's voice asking me something about Jane; who was she: I told her: There, over there, see for yourself. She drew in her breath sharply and that pleased me. Harry muttered: "Where? Eh?" Then he gasped: "*Oh!*"

They were sitting down at the little table. Jane still hadn't looked round; now she glanced quickly at the man opposite her and smiled; the head waiter was putting one of the big menus in front of her and she took it almost eagerly like a screen in front of her face; if she'd looked

in any direction at all she'd have seen people looking back at her. But she never turned her head or so much as glanced at anyone else.

I asked Victoria: "Would you mind if they joined us?"

She didn't answer. As I left the table I heard Harry saying: "That fellow'll never let . . ." and I thought: Oh, yes, *he will!* The band had started playing again but I didn't hear it because the whole night was singing in my ears and it was the sweetest song I ever heard, a soaring, golden song that went with a green silk dress and green eyes and streaky-yellow hair; I wasn't drunk but, if my feet were on the ground, I'd have needed to look down to know it.

When I came to their table the man looked up at me sharply as if he was asking what the hell I wanted; I didn't blame him. I smiled at him; after all, he'd brought her here, I owed him that. I stood beside the table, more or less between them, and looked down at Jane. She didn't look up, at first. She glanced at him, saw him watching me with that questioning look on his face. She glanced back at the menu. Then I suppose curiosity won because he was still staring up at me and neither of us had said a word; I saw a puzzled expression come into her face. Suddenly she and I were looking at each other and I saw the shock in her eyes.

"Jane."

I could see that it was quite an effort for her to relax: she sat back and her fingers loosened on the edges of the menu. "Ted . . .!" She was wearing a double rope of pearls and I didn't remember her having them three years ago. "Darling . . ."

Not to me, that *darling*. She was talking to the man opposite her. "Darling, this is Ted Carpenter." He half rose in his chair, and offered me his hand. It was white and amazingly soft: when I'd shaken it I let it go. Jane's eyes came back to mine and she said: "We . . . I knew

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Ted and his wife, years ago. In Cape Town . . ."

"My wife died." I was telling him, not her; but looking at her. She told me quickly:

"This is my husband, Felix Lessing. Did you hear I'd got married?"

I looked at Lessing. "Congratulations!" It was a thing one said, an automatic reaction; the congratulations were for him, not for Jane. I told her: "No, I hadn't heard."

Lessing cleared his throat rather impatiently. "Would you care to join us? There might be room . . ."

I looked down at the little table and couldn't help smiling. In making the suggestion he'd known damn well it was ridiculous; there wasn't room for two, let alone three. But now he'd made it, he could hardly refuse mine.

"Very nice of you. But I came over to ask *you* that. Our table's an outsize; do come over." I waved in the direction of the Cleweses. Jane looked doubtfully at her husband. He nodded, slowly, without any sign of pleasure.

"Well, thank you. If you're sure . . ."

The head waiter had been hovering behind Lessing and hadn't missed a word. Now he hurried away and, as I pulled back Jane's chair for her, I saw him talking to Harry and waving at one of the African waiters to bring up chairs. He caught another, who was passing, by the arm, and by the motions of his free hand I could see that he was instructing him to lay the extra places.

By the time we got there, it looked like a table for five.

"I saw you earlier, at the races." We were dancing, at last. I'd waited an hour to have her to myself.

"I didn't see you." The band stopped and she moved as if to go back to the others, but I still had hold of her arm. "Ted . . ."

"It isn't over yet." They struck up another slow fox-trot and I held her close to me; not close enough, but close. The floor was crowded, nobody could see us. Once or

twice she'd moved away from me, but it never lasted long. She forgot, or gave up. She told me now, whispering, her voice close to my ear:

"It is over, Ted. A long time ago."

I tightened my arm round her and turned my head and my lips brushed her hair. "Does it feel to you as if it's over?"

She didn't answer for a moment. When she did, it wasn't an answer at all; it was another question.

"Doesn't . . . Felix . . . make any difference to you?"

I knew then that I was going to win. When the band stopped playing, and we had to go back to the table, it didn't matter. The interruption was only temporary. I watched Jane's husband as he scrambled up and held the chair for her and—I know this makes it worse—I felt sorry for him.

I hadn't answered Jane's question. She'd known the answer before she asked it. It had been more a comment, than a question.

"What an extraordinary thing!"

Lessing had just told Harry that they were on their way North to Tanganyika. I'd been talking to Jane and Victoria about the day's racing and I'd heard Lessing and stopped in the middle of what I was saying. Lessing raised his eyebrows, and turned back to Harry to finish his sentence: "A week or so in Dar-es-Salaam." Then he shifted slightly in his chair and looked at me with a peculiar intensity, as if he was trying to see through my eyes into my brain and discover from that what I found extraordinary in his statement.

Up to now, all I'd learned was that they were on holiday and that Lessing was combining it with a certain amount of business: they lived in Johannesburg, where he ran some firm or other. It had never occurred to me, from what I'd heard, that they were going farther north than this. I'd decided that I'd stay an extra day or so here, see

as much of Jane as I could, and find out where I could find her in Johannesburg, when I'd finished the trip.

I apologised to Lessing. "Sorry I interrupted you. But you see, it's such a coincidence . . ."

Harry nodded enthusiastically. "Really is. Ted's going up that way, too!" The Cleweses had been most useful; I hadn't needed to ask Lessing, or even Jane, a single question about their movements. Harry and Victoria, showing polite interest and making conversation, had done it all for me.

Lessing glanced at Harry, then back at me. He nodded. "It is a coincidence." Jane was watching her husband as he spoke; it seemed to me that she was deliberately giving him all her attention, only looking at me or at Harry when the direction of the conversation made it necessary. As for the rest of the room, well, I doubt if she knew what it looked like. I'd been wondering whether she was frightened of him, or whether he was jealously sensitive of her attraction to every man who saw her, and she trying to reassure him. Now it was she who helped me, perhaps accidentally.

"Are you going through Nyasaland, too? Blantyre?"

I nodded at them both. "Why, yes! But I thought I was being rather adventurous. They say the road's awful." I smiled at Jane's husband. "Perhaps we'll see each other along the way. Always nice to know there's a car behind, if you run into trouble. . . ."

Harry was looking puzzled and I was praying that he'd keep his mouth shut. I'd made it so plain, after our meeting with those bookies or whatever they were, that I was heading up the road through Northern Rhodesia, through Kapiri Mposhi. I'd even told them that I hoped to stop for the first night at Mpika. (That had been wild talk, incidentally: a hell of a trip for one day, over those corrugations.) There was no puzzlement in Victoria's face, just plain disapproval. I looked back at Lessing.

He was an odd sort of man. Not as short as I'd thought he was at first; his thick build, heavy face and large head all accentuated that impression. But I'd been surprised, when he stood up to come over to our table, to see that he wasn't much below my own height—an inch or two, no more. Another thing that gave him the squat appearance was seeing him beside Jane; on her high heels, the top of her head was an inch above his, and her slim figure contrasted with his bulk.

At a glance I could see that he was a man who looked after himself; his face had a sleek, powdery look, the product of careful shaving and hot towels in barbers' shops, and his nails were manicured. But the eyes provided a contrast to this over-all softness. They were hard and shrewd; I felt it was the real Lessing who looked out of them, when the mask occasionally slipped. He must have known when it happened, because he had a way of covering it up quickly with a smile, a grimace which I can only describe as a deliberate muscular relaxation of his expression. His manner was easy, but the ease, too, was contrived—the acquired smoothness of a salesman who knows he's worth five times the value of his customer but tries his damndest not to let the customer see he knows it.

It was not only unpleasant, but difficult, to think of Jane as this man's wife. They were so totally different—physically, such contrasts that their appearance together struck me as freakish and sickening. I couldn't help thinking of them in bed together, of him making love to her, of those soft, fat hands caressing the incredible beauty of her body. I looked at those hands where they lay limply on the table and, suddenly, they were two gross slugs; if they moved now, they'd leave a trail of slime on the clean, white cloth.

I wondered if they made *her* feel sick. . . .

I looked up, thinking: *This is an education, I've never hated a pair of hands before!* Looked up, and met Lessing's

eyes hard and probing as if they'd been ready and aimed for some time, waiting in ambush to catch mine and let me know that they recognised hate when they saw it. Just for a second we were staring at each other and the barriers were down: then the camouflage swept over his face and he was looking down at his hands, smiling at them as if at friends with whom his eyes shared secrets. ,

Harry was asking Jane if she'd like to dance; she glanced immediately at Lessing, who turned to Victoria. His voice had a silky purr to it, an overlay of charm. "Mrs Clewes, I'm a very poor dancer, I'm afraid, but . . ."

I stood up and watched the four of them drift away into the swirl of people on the dance floor. I lit a cigarette and pulled the dripping bottle out of its bucket; a waiter hurried forward to fill my glass for me. Jane came past, dancing with Harry, who couldn't: but they were enjoying themselves, he talking and obviously amusing her; she seemed to be loosening up a bit. It occurred to me that this was the first time I'd seen her dancing with anyone else. We'd been out alone, the two of us, on the few occasions when it had been possible.

What a fool I'd been! But for my plain stupidity, silly emotionalism and misplaced conscience, she—Jane—would by now be my wife! Thinking of it, contrasting what might have been with the facts of the present situation, made me feel ill again. I needed a drink other than champagne. I picked my way around the edge of the dance-floor and through to the bar, which was full of unattached men who'd come there to drink and stare at other men's women. I stood among them while I drank a large whisky and water and, more as an excuse for being there than anything else, I bought myself some cigarettes as well.

When I got back to the table, Harry and Jane were there. I asked them: "What's the matter? Sprained something?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm no good," he told me. "Mrs Lessing pretended she wanted to go on, but . . ."

"Then go on with me, Jane. If Harry won't."

The band was playing a slow thing which we'd danced to, she and I, years ago. It had been new then, and Jane had a record of it in her flat. The band at the High Noon Hotel had played it for us, too, on the Saturday night before everything collapsed. I remembered that night very clearly; I'd made up my mind that after the week-end I was going to tell Penny all about it and ask her to divorce me. Jane and I had talked about it all day and the decision cleared the air somehow; there was a feeling that we had no need to hide now; we were going to face the gossips and tell them: It's true, we're in love and you don't have to know us if you don't want to! There was a fresh feeling of open purpose between us; it even affected our love-making and when we woke in the morning we both laughed with sheer happiness. . . .

Jane danced close against me; there was not much dancing about it, there wasn't space for that. Even if she hadn't liked it, she couldn't have done anything about it, because the crowd of dancers forced us together. We drifted close by Lessing and Victoria and exchanged smiles; he couldn't see how tightly my hand in the small of Jane's back was holding her to me . . . the softness of her. Her left hand had been light on my shoulder, but now suddenly she slid it round a little and pulled at me, the fingers pressing, and her other hand tightened, too, and she was pulling herself on to me, her body moving with the music against mine. Her eyes were almost closed and her lips were parted as if she was waiting for me to kiss her; somehow I managed not to. The music ended, but for a moment she still moved against me, like a cat; then as we separated, turning into the crowd that was thinning round us, she whispered: "*Ted: Ted, darling . . .*"

I saw Lessing's back; he and Victoria were half-way to

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the table. Victoria looked round over her shoulder and smiled at Jane. As we came up to them she asked her: "What happened? Did my lout of a husband jump on your toes?"

Harry was standing there, grinning. He said: "She was game for more, but I hadn't the heart." He added: "I'm a rotten dancer."

Lessing smirked. "That is something we have in common, Mr Clewes. Perhaps we should take lessons from our friend here." He turned and stared at me for a second; then he transferred his gaze to Jane's pale face and suddenly chuckled. He asked Victoria: "They made a handsome couple, don't you think so?"

Victoria was embarrassed, plainly without an answer. We were all sitting by now, and the waiter was bringing a new bottle round the table and filling our glasses. Lessing slid his paw across the table; I watched it close over Jane's small, fine-boned hand. It seemed to me the grip of that fleshy hand was hard, much too hard, as if he was trying to hurt her. I almost expected her to cry out, but she didn't, nor even, so far as I could see, try to move her hand. I looked up and for the second time that evening found Lessing's eyes waiting for me. At once, he smiled.

"To our journey, Mr Carpenter!"

He was holding his glass up in his right hand. That meant he'd released Jane's. I looked down and saw that she hadn't moved it; it lay there, delicate and narrow, the marks of Lessing's fingers four ugly blotches on the smooth, white skin.

They'd finished the last dance; the party was over. Harry had taken the last bottle of champagne out of the ice and found it empty; I'd paid the bill for the dinner, and Harry'd paid for the wine. He'd come off a lot worse than I had.

As we made our way out through the almost empty restaurant, Lessing fell into step beside me.

"You are setting out early in the morning, Mr Carpenter?"

I hadn't asked him, or Jane, when they planned to leave for the north. I knew they were leaving the next day, because Harry had invited them to lunch, and Lessing had refused, saying that he hoped they'd be on their way by then. It didn't matter; I'd be stopping off here and there, whenever there was anything worth photographing in colour, and sooner or later I'd fall in with them.

I told Lessing: "As early as I can. It's a lousy road, the Portuguese section. And if you're unlucky you can waste a lot of time at the frontier posts."

"You have travelled on this road before?"

"No. But I've heard a lot about it."

Lessing nodded. "I, too." He spoke without any sort of accent, but with irritating grammatical accuracy. He murmured: "We cross the Zambesi on a ferry, I believe?"

"A pont. At Tete. That could be another hold-up. Are you going right through to Blantyre?" I'd thought that, if I didn't ask him a question soon, it'd seem odd.

"I think so. I have made a reservation in the hotel. You think four hundred miles is too much for one day?" We were downstairs now, out of the lift and pausing in a group on the pavement.

"Not with fair going. But if you do get held up, there's a hotel just inside the Nyasaland border."

"So they told me." He gave me his hand. The one that had hurt Jane. I was tempted to crush it, but I thought: There's a long way to go. I shook it briefly.

"Good night." Jane had taken his arm. "Good night, Jane. See you on the road."

Lessing smiled. "We will both look forward to that pleasure, Mr Carpenter. It was a most fortunate meeting. Was it not, my dear?"

"Very." Jane's voice was low. "Good night, Ted."

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I sat in the back while Harry drove me to my hotel. Victoria spoke without turning round: "I'm disappointed in you, Ted."

"Oh?" She didn't elaborate. Harry muttered: "*Women!*" He swerved the car sharply into First Street.

I addressed the back of Victoria's head. "I should have thought you'd be pleased. You've always teased me about not having any love life."

Victoria said quietly: "Someone else's, Ted. You're going to try and wreck it, aren't you?"

From First Street into Stanley Avenue—an empty street and a cool, clear night. At the next intersection Harry swung over and stopped outside the hotel. There was no answer I could give Victoria; there was so much she didn't know. If she did, she'd still disapprove, but she'd understand. I said good night as I got out. I was turning to go up the steps when Harry stuck his head out of the window.

"Ted."

I turned back. "Uh?"

"Watch out for that chap Lessing. He doesn't like you much."

"Thanks, Harry. Good night." I went into the hotel, and asked the night-porter for my key.

Jane . . .

TED'S STORY-V

TWIN RIBBONS OF TAR streamed out ahead of me, grey-black with the khaki-red of Rhodesian dust between them and outside them. I don't know if they have strip roads anywhere except in Southern and East Africa; in case not, I'd better explain that the strips of tar, each about two feet wide, are laid like railway lines along the dirt road. You drive with one set of wheels on each strip and, when two cars pass or overtake, then each turns off to put its inside wheels on the outside strip and the other pair in the dirt. A wise driver gets off the strips well before the other car is close, because the swerve off into the loose gravel sends stones flying like shrapnel and one of the most common mishaps to drivers in Rhodesia is a shattered windscreen; the curved type on the sort of car I was driving costs about fifty pounds to replace. But strips are quite comfortable, once you're used to them, providing they're fairly new or well maintained; if they're potholed, it's easier to ignore them and drive in the dirt.

I'd had an early breakfast and paid my bill as soon as a rather irritable receptionist came on duty. By that time my luggage was already stowed in the back parts of the station wagon, so there was nothing else to wait for. I drove up Third Street, which was empty except for some cars parked here and there, and turned right into Rhodes Avenue; from there on, all I had to do was to follow my nose for about four hundred miles. The good tar gave out after a few miles but I didn't even notice the transition; I'd been thinking about Jane, and Lessing, and when I

came momentarily to an awareness of the present I was driving on strips and the sun was climbing out of the top edge of my windscreen.

I was glad to see it go. My head was aching and my eyes hurt; they'd already shut of their own accord, once or twice, and to drive on strips at seventy miles an hour with your eyes shut isn't the safest way of getting about Africa. I had to concentrate on keeping them open by sheer muscular effort, holding them more widely open than is their natural position, with my eyebrows raised in consequence, so as to counter the tendency of the lids to fall like a portcullis or a guillotine.

It wasn't just that I'd had too much to drink the night before. You'd think that after that quantity of alcohol I'd have slept soundly: but I hadn't. The excitement of finding Jane had been more than equal to the soporific influence of the drinks, and I'd spent the night in spasms of half-sleep (with her voice in my ears and the feel of her against me, leaning on me as she had when we danced that last time) and waking, each time a struggle to sort out dream from fact; behind her, through her, I saw Lessing's probing, thoughtfully malicious stare. Waking once (I'd slept naked, on top of the bed covers, with all the windows open), I was aware that I'd been talking aloud to her, and it still felt as if she was there in the room with me. I saw the glimmering of dawn outside and remembered that she was in some other room . . . with Lessing. I didn't sleep again.

I put on a dressing-gown and went out on to the balcony and watched the light grow into Cecil Square, turning the jacarandas grey and then silver and finally green and mauve, the ground under them mauve as well where it was carpeted with the fallen petals, deep mauve stains splashed across the short green grass and over the red-brown paths and edgings. Down there, in Cecil Square, the men of the Pioneer Column had first hoisted the Union Jack, in 1890.

I stood watching the light grow into the trees and shine down out of them until it met and mixed in with the light shining up off the grass, and made day; and I thought about Jane . . . about her, and about myself, and how it was and had been and was going to be again—*had* to be.

Judgment is so easy. From what people know of me and Jane, I dare say that I stand condemned. . . . I'd be found guilty in five minutes: unfaithful to my wife when she lived and, now, planning to break up a marriage.

I couldn't plead anything but guilty. All I can say is that the feeling I had for Jane was a force so compelling that I had no choice; if I had the time over again I couldn't act in any other way. I had never been *in love* before; I'd thought I had, but I hadn't known a thing about it—not even the meaning of the word. I wish now there was some other that I could use, one less abused and misused in writing and in speech. I don't have to look back to say this, because I am still in love with her, as I was then.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that to be *in love*, to feel for a woman the way I felt, and feel, for her, is any justification for breaking laws or ignoring moral codes. All I am saying is that what I did, I was unable to avoid doing, and would do again. I would do much worse.

She'd been my mistress, and I wanted her now in the same way; but the physical wanting was only a part of the whole. The force that drove me after her was not the same thing that sends a dog after a bitch, but a complete and absolute knowledge that only with her, in her, through her, beside her and for her could I ever really live.

If I seem to have put these things down plainly and without emotion, I would explain that I have been carefully avoiding any words or phrases of a rhetorical or impassioned flavour: I am trying in this way to make it clear that I am neither seeking nor wanting either sympathy or

condonation. It is just that I have this story to tell and that, for the proper understanding of it, it is desirable to give some explanation of the force, amounting to compulsion, which governed my actions at the time.

At Mrewa, fifty-five miles out of Salisbury, the strips gave way to a nine-foot tar mat. I was wondering what Lessing planned. If he was ahead of me, I'd soon find out, because in another thirty-nine miles—if my map was right, which it probably was because the Pan African Touring Club made it—I'd be checking out of the Rhodesian Customs and Immigration at Mtoko, and I'd be able to see in the book there if anyone had been through before me. I didn't think they'd be ahead; Lessing didn't seem to me to be the early-rising type and, since he'd have a pretty good idea that I'd be on the way as soon as I could, he'd have nothing to gain by doing the same thing.

It depended, really, on whether he'd even try to avoid falling in with me. My guess, from what I'd seen of the man, was that he wouldn't, that he'd be confident of his own ability to handle whatever I had to offer, and that he'd rather do that than take the less dignified course of trying to get away from me. With a woman on his hands he'd be at a disadvantage in any case, because the saying that 'he travels faster who travels alone' is a true one. It occurred to me that I might be wrong, might be off-track in my assessment of him, and going too much by what I'd do myself if I was in his position. Thinking of it that way, trying to imagine myself in his place, made me feel sorry for him again, but only for a moment. I had only to think of him and Jane together for that rather watery compassion to change into a very active dislike.

Supposing, though, that I was Lessing and that I wanted to avoid meeting Carpenter on my way north, I knew exactly what I'd do. Lessing knew that Carpenter was going to Ryall's Hotel in Blantyre; it was a long enough

trip for one day's driving, particularly from what one knew of the road through the Portuguese strip, and it would be reasonable to assume (for Lessing) that Carpenter had been telling the truth when he stated this intention. So Lessing, having told Carpenter that he, too, planned to spend that night in Blantyre, might hope that Carpenter would get there and settle down to wait for him in the hotel. Lessing would therefore leave Salisbury in the middle of the morning, taking care not to run up behind Carpenter on the way, and adjusting his speed so as to pass through Blantyre soon after dark. He'd drive on another forty-two miles to Zomba, where there's a good hotel on the hillside above the town; he'd get away again at dawn, with a head start and a reasonable hope that Carpenter would still be hanging around in Blantyre, waiting for him and Jane to clock in.

But then, he could double up on that, too. He could realise that Carpenter, looking at a map and not being altogether stupid, might anticipate such a trick. Then Lessing'd wait a day in Salisbury and hope that Carpenter, thinking his quarry was ahead instead of behind, would tear off northwards through Nyasaland.

(The tar mat had come to an abrupt end. I was driving on a wide gravel road, corrugated in places but not at all bad, and I didn't have to reduce speed. Then the tar started again, and there were twenty miles to Mtoko.)

I didn't think Lessing would do either of those things. He had to get to where he was going, the East Coast, and if he had to keep behind me he'd lose days on his schedule. He looked like a man who appreciated comfort, and I thought he'd stick to whatever hotel bookings he'd made. Then, too, it's much more difficult to stay behind someone than to get away ahead.

I had a feeling that Harry Clewes had been right in his warning—that Lessing would be looking for me as much as I was looking for him. He'd want to have the thing out

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and dispose of it. To run away would be to lose face with Jane, and I was sure that he wouldn't want to do that. Nor would I; he and I were as committed as two fighting cocks dropped into the pit. Only our audience, which was Jane, was right in the pit with us and this complicated the business, for me at any rate, because I was determined that, whatever developed, it wasn't going to hurt her. I doubted if Lessing would have the same compunctions but I may have been misjudging him; it was possible that he loved her as much as I did. I didn't think so, I didn't think it was even possible, but one had to allow for it.

About two hundred yards ahead I saw the top of a lorry's cab show over a sharp rise in the road; I eased the Dodge over towards the left, the tyres sliding off the raised edge of tar and ploughing into the grit and churning it noisily against the insides of the mudguards. The lorry came up into full view and it wasn't a lorry at all, it was one of those enormous trucks like furniture vans which run long-distance transport services all over Africa. I've always admired their drivers for pushing those cumbersome monstrosities along some of the world's worst roads, year in and year out and even in the rains; if I had to make a list of the jobs I'd most dislike that one would be high on the list.

As this one came over the ridge its driver dragged it off the crown of the road and we passed in a cloud of flying dirt, each of us driving blindly into the smoke-screen on the other's tail. Just before we met, the van-driver raised a hand in quick greeting, and I waved back, and at the same moment I read the name that was painted across the top of his cab: AFRICAN ROAD HAULAGE COMPANY. Then we'd passed and I could see the tar again because the dust was blowing south. I stayed on the edge of the road until I was over the hump, because there might have been another truck behind the first one; sometimes

they travel in convoy. But the road was clear ahead, so I got back on the hard surface and pushed the car up to seventy again.

I hadn't met African Road Haulage before: either it was a new firm or it only operated on this Salisbury-Blantyre route.

Mtoko wasn't far ahead, now. On either side of the road were stunted brown bush and outcrops of rock, all coated in dust, and I dare say farm land beyond the fringe—dull country, no rest for the eyes. By keeping mine on the road I wasn't missing anything, but I did glance quite frequently at the rear mirror; Lessing mightn't be so far behind. I wondered what sort of car he drove; I imagined it would be something rather new and luxurious.

And so to Mtoko. In the last hour or so a pleasant thought had lingered in the back of my mind—that I'd stop for a few minutes at the hotel and drink a glass of cold beer. What with last night, and the heat of today, I'd been looking forward to Mtoko.

It wasn't much of a place. The Customs office was little more than a hut; there was nobody in it so I went back to the car and hooted, and an African, who'd been leaning against the signpost and watching me in that lazy way that Africans have of watching people, suddenly grinned at me and set off at a walk towards another building close by. He came back following a white man who wore slacks and a check shirt. He was a very young man and when I said 'Good morning' to him he just looked at me in a seriously official manner and walked into the hut ahead of me. When I got inside he was already behind the desk and opening the ledger. I handed him my car papers and passport and he began writing the details in his book slowly and carefully. He hadn't said a word.

I tried to see the line above mine but I couldn't lean too far over the desk and he had his face close to his work, obscuring what I wanted to see. I asked him:

"Have some friends of mine named Lessing been through yet?"

The boy glanced up at me sharply as if I'd said something nasty. Then he looked down at the page and ran his finger up the column of names. I could see the dates clearly enough in another column, and by the time he was at the top of the sheet I knew he'd gone back about three days. He licked his fingers and took hold of the top left corner to turn back to last week, but I saved him the effort.

"It would have been this morning."

He glanced up almost angrily, as if he was thinking that I'd let him waste his lick for no purpose. Moisture, no doubt, was precious in this glare. He finished his entry and handed me back my documents. I decided to risk breaking the silence just once more.

"Can you tell me where the hotel is?" He came to the door of the hut with me and pointed down the road, in the direction I was taking. Lowering his arm he told me: "Down there, and right. Can't miss it." I thanked him.

Ten minutes or less standing in the sun—there was no shade within a hundred yards—had turned the inside of the car into an oven. I got it moving as fast as I could to get the air circulating, and followed the Customs Officer's directions. He was right, the hotel wasn't hard to find. But then, in a place the size of Mtoko it'd be difficult to hide a cat, let alone a hotel. When I drove up to it I saw that its chief characteristic was a very large outcrop of rock growing right up through the centre of what was obviously the car park: there was no shade here either.

I had the drink in a little room like a Victorian parlour. I don't remember the details of it, but a reasonable impression is of a galaxy of stuffed chairs, some pretty frightful pictures, a fat fish in a glass case, and a cloth, baize or velvet, on the table—a hot little room in a climate that

didn't suit it. If the proprietress had come in with a lace cap on her head and a horn ear-trumpet, she'd have looked like part of the furniture.

But if there was a proprietress, I didn't see her. An African waiter brought my drink on a tin tray which advertised the brewery; I'd ordered a bottle of beer and a bottle of ginger beer and a big glass, because just one bottle of beer wouldn't have been enough to quench my thirst and two might have sent me to sleep at the wheel of the car. There was still quite a long way to go—nearly three hundred miles.

It was a bit early for lunch, but this seemed as good a time as any to eat the sandwiches I'd brought with me. They were good, but the shandy was delicious. I sat back in one of the fat chairs, with my legs up on a stuffed elephant's foot, and munched the sandwiches with a swallow or two of that tingling, ice-cold liquid between each one. When the chair reached body-temperature, I moved to another one. From here the window was in front of me across the room and, if I'd heard a car coming, I'd need only to stand up and I'd be able to see right down to the corner of the road.

So Lessing was behind me, since he wasn't in the Customs book. I was sorry that I'd had to ask that fellow, instead of just seeing for myself: but he certainly wasn't a chatty type and it was unlikely that he'd mention my inquiry when the others did arrive. Certainly Lessing would have expected me to be checking his movements but, all the same, I didn't want to make my interest in him more obvious than it had to be.

When I'd finished the sandwiches, I resisted the temptation to order more beer. Instead I went out to that super-heated oven of a car and took it over to the pump and had them fill its tank. I'd enough petrol left to reach Tete, anyway, but experience of long-distance driving in the bleaker stretches of Africa had taught me not to run to the

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limit, because you can do that and find that the pump you've been aiming for has gone dry until the tanker calls next week. It can be very embarrassing. I was safe enough, because I was carrying an extra four gallons in a can in the back, but it's better to be doubly safe than just safe. On the long stretches it's not uncommon to find a tourist's car stranded, and if you have to pour all your spare petrol into someone else's tank that's your own margin of safety gone.

So I filled up, and by the time I was under way again I'd lost more in sweat than I'd gained in iced shandy. The road was just hard dirt and gravel, now, ninety-odd miles of it and all down-hill, down the escarpment into the Zambesi valley. Scrubby bush on both sides was dotted about with patches of rock, and everything was smothered in dust. This was lion country, so I'd heard. As far as I was concerned, the lions could have it. I kept my foot well down and the Dodge skimmed easily over the corrugations, but in patches the surface was bad, with stones and pot-holes, and I slowed for these stretches, because I didn't want a cracked sump. The bush gave way gradually to trees, thick timber, real forest. It made a change but it still wasn't much to look at. I could feel the change of pressure in my ears, and every few miles I swallowed to clear them; over these ninety miles to Changara I was dropping three thousand feet.

As the car hammered along over the ruts I thought about Jane again—her coldness, almost alarm, when we'd met, then the very obvious and deliberate show she'd made of giving all her attention to Lessing, and then, suddenly, on the dance floor . . .

I was thinking back through a distance and over a barrier, trying to guess at the relationship between them. Something failed to make sense—her fear of him, or whatever it was that made her so careful to keep her eyes on him, and then, suddenly, that dance. Knowing Jane as I

did, it didn't add up. It would be easy enough to explain it if it was some other woman involved; but Jane was uncomplicated and straightforward and I wouldn't have thought her capable of wearing two faces at once.

An hour after leaving Mtoko I was in Portuguese territory; from the border there were thirty more dreary miles to Changara and when I got there the sun was just about overhead. I was glad I'd eaten the hotel's sandwiches early, because for all the trees that edged the road there wasn't a speck of shade anywhere and it wouldn't have been easy to find a stopping place.

The Portuguese Customs were in a little single-storied house with bougainvillæa on its fence and no grass growing on its lawn. The Customs Officer, who lived here with his family, was short and fat with a friendly smile; nods and smiles were all we exchanged because neither of us spoke or understood the other's language and it was too hot to try French. I was thirsty and, after he'd made the usual notes about me and stamped my passport, I asked him if I could have a glass of water; he smiled and shook his head sadly and said something in the same tone. I made signs at him, raising an imaginary glass to my lips, and he caught on. He kicked open a door at the back of the room he used as an office and called, and a little girl of about seven or eight came in at once. He spoke to her in Portuguese and gestured to me to follow her; her round, brown eyes stared at me for a moment, then she led me down a passage to the bathroom and went in ahead of me and stood holding the door open. There was a tumbler on the washbasin and I had my drink of warm water; the child stood inside the room all the time and never took her eyes off me. It was just as well I didn't want to use the lavatory. She led me back to the office and, when I thanked her in English, she turned her head sideways and put her hands over her face, and her father laughed and pushed her out. I shook hands with him and we exchanged

courteous remarks which neither of us understood.

After Changara the road was still falling but the forest was thinner with every mile; before I got into Tete it was almost open country. It was also very hot, which is hardly surprising because I was now only two hundred and fifty feet above sea level. When I got out, while a Portuguese-speaking African filled the tank up for me, I could smell the river although I couldn't see it yet. Petrol was five shillings a gallon, which was the highest I'd struck so far in my travels.

I drove on, through the sweltering and apparently deserted town, towards the south bank of the Zambesi. If I'd had time and it wasn't so hot, I'd have liked to have looked around Tete; it was founded in 1531, a hundred and twenty years before Cape Town, and by the standards of white settlement in Southern Africa Cape Town is reckoned to be pretty old. I wondered if the founders had been missionaries or slavers; they had to be one or the other, I imagine, in 1531.

There were no cars ahead of me when I got to the river, because the ferry had just left the bank. The Zambesi, about seven hundred yards wide at this point, was running fast from left to right, which is to say south-eastwards, towards the sea; the diesel launch that towed the ferry was having to steer up-river against the current, heading off about forty-five degrees to port to make good its course to Benga, which is on the north bank. It struck me that if the river ran any faster than this they'd need a more powerful launch to get across at all.

I parked at the top of the slope and got out to stretch my legs. A crowd of little piccanins ran up to me shouting "Penny, penny!" I had a few in my pocket and handed them out; when the children still held out their pink-palmed hands and still shrieked "Penny!", I pulled out the lining of my pocket to show them how empty it was. They ran off, laughing and squabbling and kicking up the dust

and shouting over their shoulders things which were probably very rude.'

It's odd. You drive two hundred miles and on the way you hardly see another car; then you wait ten minutes at a ferry and a whole bevy of them roll up behind you. The first arrival was a Volkswagen, with two young men in it; both were fair, and red-faced from the sun, and they were talking to each other in Swedish—it may have been Danish but I think they were Swedes. They parked their little car behind mine and sprang out with excited cries; each had a cine-camera and they spent the next few minutes filming everything in sight, mostly just river but also each other and their car and then the little black boys who came up fast to ask for pennies. The Swedes gave them oranges instead, and the piccanins devoured these immediately in a peculiarly voracious and slightly revolting manner, biting chunks out of the fruit and then spitting out mouthfuls of mangled peel. The Swedes photographed them doing this, close-up. From the satisfied expressions on their faces it was obvious that they felt they were getting the heart and soul of Africa on to their little rolls of celluloid.

Then another car joined the queue. It was a flashy two-tone Buick and it wore Belgian Congo number-plates. The driver was a short, plump man with a very white, damp-looking face and a thin moustache. He wore a multi-coloured zoot shirt and was smoking a cigar. Beside him sat his wife, a big, dark woman in heavy make-up and some sort of sunsuit. In the back of the car were two very pretty girls, probably in their teens. They were dark, like their mother, and after they got married they'd most likely get fat like her, but for the time being they were very attractive. The Swedes thought so, too; they kept glancing at the car and edging closer to it, shuffling their feet and grinning self-consciously.

The ferry was on its way back. The Swedes and their

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cameras had reminded me that I was here to take pictures, and it occurred to me that I might as well take one of the ferry as it approached the ramp; I thought these girls would look well in the foreground, from a tourist point of view, so I went up to the mother's side of the Buick and asked her in French if she'd have any objection. If she had, she didn't get a chance to voice it. The girls loved the idea; they jumped out and ran down to the water's edge and adopted poses which they considered becoming. I got my camera out of the car, moved the girls to where I wanted them, and waited for the ferry to come into the picture. Meanwhile the two Swedes circled round, taking cine-shots of my models from various angles, keeping a nervous distance as if they were filming wild animals which might take off if frightened. Then the ferry sloshed into position and I took my colour snap. I thanked the girls and they seemed disappointed. The one in pink slacks asked me, petulantly: "Only one? It's finished?" I told her yes, one was all I needed, and thanked them again, and they went angrily back to their car. The Swedes filmed them every inch of the way.

Well, I had the first colour plate for Jimmy Townsend's brochure. Centre, a rather dilapidated pontoon under tow from a straining launch; in the pontoon, some cars, a lorry, and about thirty bicycles with their African owners. Back and surround, flat, mud-coloured water. Foreground, two girls with bottoms rather too large for their brightly-coloured trousers. Caption, BENGAL FERRY—ZAMBESI RIVER. (PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA.) Jimmy would love it.

As I got into the Dodge I noticed that our queue was longer by another car and two lorries; I hoped they wouldn't be able to find deck space for the whole lot on this trip, because, if they could, they would, and, if they did, the thing would sink. The last of the westbound traffic was growling up the slope and one of the African

ferryman waved at me to start down. I did, in first gear and with extreme caution, telling myself that thousands of cars must have done this before me and that the sickening fear which possessed me as I approached those unstable-looking planks was something to be ashamed of. I suppose it was.

All the way over, the Swedes had their cameras buzzing. The two girls posed for them, leaning on the front rail beside the bonnet of the Dodge and sticking their bottoms out provocatively. Just before we touched the north bank, one of the Swedes got in close and said something to the girl in terracotta trousers; she turned and stared at him, then spoke to her sister. They both shrugged and went back to Mum, not looking at the Swede as they passed him. I suppose he'd taken so long over it that he'd earned their contempt.

Now there were seventy-eight more miles of Portuguese territory to cover, and the road over this stretch was certainly bad—hard dirt, full of deep pot-holes with jagged edges, loose rock, corrugations. It took me more than two hours, but that included a stop to fit a new fanbelt. I'd been struggling along over that foul surface, with the shock-absorbers banging away like cannons and the front wheels pounding so that holding the wheel was rather like holding a pneumatic drill (or whatever they call those things that are used for digging up roads), when I noticed that the engine temperature had shot right up into the danger section of the dial. I stopped the car, went round and opened the bonnet and saw that there was no fanbelt where one ought to be. I had a spare, and the spanner I needed, but it took quite a lot of getting at because everything was very carefully and tightly packed in the back of the car, padded and roped together to avoid rattles.

The road was narrow and dense bush grew right up to its edges. The thing I noticed most, though, was a particularly unpleasant smell, as of decaying bodies, and it

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struck me that some animal must be dead near-by. There was no breeze at all, and in the heat of the day the stench of whatever it was clung around me like physical dirt. But I was right about it being a dead animal, because, when I stepped back from the car to wipe the sweat out of my eyes and looked around at the grim, dust-covered bush, I saw a vulture come gliding over the tree-tops and drop out of sight, about forty yards off the road. There were probably dozens of them there already. I put my tools away and repacked all the stuff in the back and got going again.

At Zobwe I found the Portuguese Customs post on the left of the road, and the man in charge of it hardly bothered to glance at my papers. He put his rubber stamp smack in the middle of one of the few clean pages in my passport, handed it back to me and nodded: "Okay." I drove on up the steep gritty hill and passed a sign on the left of the road which said NYASALAND BORDER. It had a silhouette of a leopard on it, too, the emblem of the Protectorate. A little farther on there were booms across the road, and the Nyasaland Customs House up on the high bank on the right, so for the fourth time that day I showed my passport and triptique. There was one difference, here: the Customs Officers were Africans.

It was the hour known in civilised places as tea-time, and I was thirsty. Barely a mile inside the frontier is a hotel, the Border Inn, and I decided to stop there for refreshment. The afternoon had been long and hot, and I'd lunched early; I was hungry, thirsty, and very dirty, and the Border Inn could most likely provide me with food, drink, and a wash. I turned into the circular driveway and scrunched up to the hotel, which was a simple, one-storied building with a veranda all round it. It looked as if all the rooms opened on to the veranda.

A waiter, or houseboy, came out of one of the doors as I stepped on to the veranda. "Morning, Bwana."

"Good afternoon." He smiled, pleasantly.

"Bwana stay night?" I told him no, that I just wanted something to eat and drink, and a wash. He asked me: "What you like? Co'cola? Beer?"

"Beer, please. Can you make some sandwiches?"

"Very sorry, kitchen locked, Madam sleep. . . . Cake?"

I laughed. "All right. Beer and cake. Where's the bathroom?" He showed me; it was just another of the many rooms which led off the veranda, but there was a piece of soap in the basin and a towel on the rail. I mention it only because this is unusual in the hotels of Africa. The boy left me to it.

When I'd washed, I found that he'd set a table and chair out on the veranda for me. On the table was a bottle of iced beer and a glass and a large section of fruit cake. It seems an odd mixture, but in fact it was so good that I polished it off and then sent for more of both. There was a slight breeze here on the hillside and the shade was deep; I didn't have to talk to anyone and it was all very pleasant.

I was nearly through the second helping when I heard a car pounding up the hill, and as it passed I recognised it as the Buick from the Congo Belge. Its dust had hardly settled when I heard another one coming; I thought: This'll be the Swedes, and I was so confident that it'd be a Volkswagen that I nearly choked on a piece of cake when I saw it wasn't. It was some make of American car, and under its coating of dust it seemed to be a light shade of yellow. Primrose is the word for it. And in the front of it sat Jane. I didn't see Lessing, because from here she'd been between me and the driver's seat.

I'd already paid the boy for each round of beer and cake as he brought it. I crammed what was left of the cake into my mouth and washed it down, vulgarly, with the remains of the beer. Then I walked over to the Dodge and climbed into the dusty heat of it and set off, not too fast, eastwards towards Blantyre. I had that same singing

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feeling that I'd had when she walked into the 'Auberge Bleu', less than twenty-four hours ago, but it seemed more like a week since I'd seen her.

The road twisted and turned, falling all the time towards the Shire river. .

TED'S STORY-VI

I DIDN'T HURRY. I dawdled down into the valley and over the iron bridge and up the undulating, winding road the other side of it. Nyasaland is prettier than most of Africa and if it hadn't been for all the blind turns and rises I'd have spent more time looking at it. There were only fifty miles to Blantyre and several hours of daylight left, so I took it slowly; I'd rather, though I don't know quite why, find them at the hotel than run up behind them along the road. Thinking of it, it struck me that Lessing might miss out Blantyre and not even go as far as Zomba; he could stop at the Shire Highlands Hotel in Limbe. It didn't matter, because with a car that colour I'd spot him anywhere.

I came on to good tar at Chileka, which is where they have their airport, and from there it was a pleasantly smooth twenty minutes into Blantyre. I drove slowly through the town and turned left where a sign said RYALL'S HOTEL; and there was the yellow car, parked close to some steps that led down to what must have been the hotel's entrance. I parked in the nearest space to it and went down the steps and into the office to see if they had a room for me. It wouldn't have mattered; I could have dined in the hotel and slept in the Dodge.

But they had a room, a double with a private bath. That was fine. I went back to the car with a small Nyasa boy and fished out the cases I'd need for the night. The boy staggered away with them, heeling over like a dinghy in a stiff breeze because one was heavy and the other only held

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three suits; I locked the car and followed him down the steps. On the way I looked at the yellow car and saw that it was a Ford, eight cylinders and this year's model.

My room was on the ground floor, off a long passage which was a continuation of the veranda. The hotel was built in a straight line, parallel to the road; it was built of brick and there was an outside staircase that led to another floor above mine. My room, and its bathroom beyond it, took the whole width of the building, with a back door out to the other side.

I tipped the boy and he left, one shoulder still slightly lower than the other. I was taking my suits out and hanging them in the cupboard when it occurred to me that to be friendly in a natural manner I ought to let Lessing know I'd arrived, so I went back to the reception desk. As I entered the office the boy who'd carried my cases bumped into me in the doorway on his way out. He jumped back, grinning, and spoke to the girl behind the desk.

"The Bwana here, madam!"

She looked up, surprised. "Oh, Mr Carpenter. I was sending to remind you that you haven't signed the book."

Nor I had. While I did it, I read the names of Mr and Mrs Lessing a couple of lines above mine. I gave the girl back her pen.

"I'd like to send a note to some friends who're staying here. Have you anything I can write on?" She nodded and gave me a sheet of the hotel's writing paper and an envelope. And her pen back again. I wrote: 'Just arrived. Will you join me for a drink on the veranda, at about seven?' I put it in the envelope and wrote 'Mr Felix Lessing' on it and gave it to the girl, and she handed it to the boy and told him their room number. I asked her: "Are they here just for the one night, do you know?"

"Yes. They're leaving after breakfast and taking sandwiches with them."

I told her that I'd like a packet of sandwiches, too, in the

morning, and she made a note of it. As I went out to go back to my room I saw the boy with my note; he was going up the outside staircase.

I enjoyed a long, hot bath, then put on a clean shirt and a suit and it was only six-thirty. I strolled along to the veranda and there were quite a few people sitting there with drinks in front of them, but not the Lessings. So I went to the bar. I hear the hotel's rebuilt, now, with a modern cocktail bar and things of that sort, but at this time you either drank on the veranda or in the pub around the corner in the side street. I found it easily enough. There were some Central African Airways staff swilling beer in a happy group, and a few other people, but it wasn't at all full. I asked the Nyasa barman to give me a pink gin without too much pink: he made it light by his standards but it was still red. I drink it with soda.

Beside me at the bar was a short, thick-set man of about my own age. He was drinking beer and his hair was cut into bristles all over his head. After a few minutes he asked: "Passing through?" and I realised that he was talking to me. I nodded and smiled and looked away, hoping that this would terminate the conversation. It didn't.

"I'm from the Union." I nodded again, but he wasn't going to leave it there. He told me: "Where I come from, we know how to treat kaffirs. Eh?"

"Ah." My aim was to be non-committal.

"Damn right! You know, you just 'ammer one, 'ere, the bloody kaffir gives you cheek and you 'it 'im, an' you know what?"

I shook my head. He told me: "They 'ave you up in Court and ship you back to the Union. Just for 'itting a cheeky kaffir, man!" I didn't know how best to comment on this very laudable arrangement, so I just looked at the fellow and raised my eyebrows. The barman, the Nyasa, was much more interested in the conversation than I was.

"I been 'ad up twice, man. Once in Salisbury, and once

'ere. Last time the bloke told me: Next time you're for it, 'e says. What d'y think of that?"

Fortunately I didn't have to give the little horror my opinion. It would have upset him and he was already on edge. What happened was that I felt a hand on my shoulder and, turning, found myself face to face with a tired newspaper man named Randy Craill. I'd last seen him in Cape Town, a year or so ago, and until this moment of seeing him I'd forgotten that he'd left there to take a job on the *Nyasaland Times*. When we'd exchanged words of mutual surprise and delight, he asked me what I was doing in Nyasaland.

"On my way through, Randy. I got here an hour or so ago and I'm off again in the morning. To Dar-es-Salaam, in easy stages."

"Lucky blighter! If I could get off, I'd come with you. Are you gathering material for another of those scintillating travel tomes of yours?"

I shook my head. "Not deliberately—I mean, not consciously. I'm going up to Kenya, after Dar, to take some pictures for a thing that Townsend's doing." I looked at my watch; it was twenty minutes to seven. "Look, I've got to meet some people at seven for dinner. Let's have a drink."

"Beer." He waved a hand towards the dartboard. "Hundred and one, while we have it?" The Nyasa barman was already pouring my red gin. I told him: "And a beer, please." The South African looked up quickly and scowled at me; he poured what was left of his beer into his throat and walked out. I dare say I'd offended him by saying 'please' to a 'kaffir'. I turned to Randy.

"All right. Just one game. Who was that?" I pointed at the door.

"Chap just went out? He's a mechanic from the garage down the road here. Why?"

We played darts, and he was much better at it than I've

ever been. While we were playing he said: "You know, you ought to write about this country. There's a stack of material just waiting to be picked up."

"Such as?"

"Well, for one thing, there's the slave trade. Sixty years ago it was flourishing. Haven't you got your double, yet?"

"No." He knew damn well I hadn't, and he was nearly out. I asked him: "Tell me about this slave business." He threw a dart neatly into the double fourteen, and that was that; we went back to the bar and he ordered drinks.

"Well, at first it was the Yaos who did it all . . ."

"Yaos?"

"They came from farther north, on the Tanganyika border or thereabouts—a very bloodthirsty crowd. And the Angoni, who started off as Zulus, same as the Matabele did. These chaps used to raid their less warlike neighbours and march the prisoners to the coast, five or six hundred miles, and the ones that got there alive they'd sell to the Arabs. Then the Arabs themselves moved in and set up bases and kept the little inter-tribal wars going, and the Yaos were very happy to do most of the work for them. The Arabs built dhows and ferried their slaves across the Lake from Kota Kota. The Portuguese were in it up to their necks, of course. It was all broken up, in the end, by Sir Harry Johnston; or rather Sir Alfred Sharpe, who did the real work. Cheers!"

"Cheers! Hardly my sort of book, Randy. I write travel, you know."

"Alfred Sharpe's carryings-on'd make a wonderful novel, if you could only get the details. He used one tribe against the other, all sorts of things that'd have given the Colonial Office fits, if they'd known. Officially, you know. But Sharpe busted the slave trade for good and all in these parts."

I looked at my watch: five minutes to go. "One for the

road, Randy?" He didn't shake his head, so I nodded at the barman. I asked Craill: "Everyone *sure* there's no slave-trading today?"

He glanced at me sharply. "Why d'you ask?"

"Oh, you know, rumours. Stories in bars. And imagination too, I suppose: there's a sort of morbid fascination about it, don't you think?"

He sipped his beer. "I don't think there's any doubt that slaves—in small numbers, mark you, no organised 'trade' such as we've been talking about—do leave the East Coast, now and then, during the south-east monsoon, for the Gulf. Whether they're actually kidnapped by the slavers, or sold to the slavers by their relations, I wouldn't know. But, you see, the whole of that coast is dotted with little bays and inlets and offshore islands, hundreds of miles of cover for the dhows to slip in and out of: well, if you'd smuggle a couple of pairs of nylons or a pint of Scotch through the Customs, what's to stop an Arab smuggling a couple of luscious black popsies out—Giriamas, for instance?"

"What's a Giriama?" It was seven o'clock: time for me to go. Randy told me: "A tribe on the Kenya coast, somewhere up Malindi way. The girls are supposed to be beautiful. They're also said to disappear sometimes. And the males of the tribe have no time at all for Arabs. It adds up, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does." The gin was stirring my imagination and I was interested; I'd have liked to hear more but there wasn't any time left. "I must be off, Randy. If I come back on this road, in a month or so, I'll look you up."

He shrugged. "I'll be here later on tonight, if your friends take off early."

They weren't on the veranda yet. Perhaps they weren't coming at all. I sat down at one of the empty tables and a waiter stepped up and flicked it with his napkin; I told

him to bring me a pink gin with very little pink, and soda water, and ice. I lit a pipe and relaxed, casually watching the people at the other tables.

At the other end, I saw the Belgian Congo family. Hubby was looking very dapper in midnight-blue trousers and an off-white sharkskin jacket, and his wife was swathed tightly in striped silk; I say *in*, but at the top there was quite a lot of her well *out*. The daughters looked better in dresses than they had in trousers, but they looked bored, too. None of the family was speaking. As I watched them, one of the girls glanced round and saw me. That dull expression vanished from her pretty face and before I looked away I saw her lean forward to speak to her sister. After that, they were both looking at me whenever I happened to glance in that direction, and I began to wish the young Swedes would arrive, to take some of this eye-work off my shoulders. But just then the boy brought my gin and I was taking my first sip at it when I saw Jane coming along from the bedroom end of the hotel with Lessing behind her. I got up and went to meet them, and the Belgians must have thought I was heading for their table because there was a fluttering between the daughters which was cut off dead when they saw Jane.

She was wearing a white dress that showed her figure and gave me a sort of constriction in the throat. The dress was cut quite high in front and very low at the back. She wore a choker of some green stones that might have been beryl; they matched her eyes and glowed against the pale gold of her skin.

Men in love are, I suppose, biased about the attractions of the women they love, but no bias comes into it when I tell you that Jane, as I went forward to meet her that evening, was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my life. When I mentioned a constriction of the throat I wasn't trying to be funny, or even exaggerating; that was how I felt.

The sight of Lessing was less pleasant; in the moment of greeting Jane I'd almost forgotten him. I led them to my table and we all sat down and I ordered their drinks. Jane wanted a Tom Collins but there wasn't any fresh lime so she had to have a John Collins instead; Lessing drank whisky. When we were all settled, he raised his glass.

"Your health, Mr Carpenter."

"Cheers! Have a good trip? No troubles?"

"Troubles?" He smiled at me, the first of the evening. "Mr Carpenter, I do not recognise troubles. I have found that they are so easily overcome." He flicked his fingers. "Like that."

I returned his smile. "You're lucky. I had a broken fanbelt."

Jane put down her glass. Lessing had just offered her a cigarette from his case, which was absent-minded of him because she'd never smoked in her life. She'd shaken her head and he'd taken one for himself and placed it carefully between his lips. He was lighting it with one of those gas things as Jane murmured: "You poor thing! Were you able to mend it?"

"One doesn't. One fits a new one; which I had, luckily." Jane asked her husband: "Have we got one, Felix?" I told him: "If you haven't, you can always use a silk stocking."

My glass was empty and they'd hardly started theirs. I called the boy and Lessing said yes, he'd like a little more whisky, and Jane had already smiled at me and shaken her head. The boy went off.

Conversation wasn't easy. We talked about the road, and the ferry, and the heat, and how nice the Cleweses were, and then it came back to my blasted fanbelt and I told them about the smell of the dead animal. Jane was interested and asked me why on earth I hadn't gone into the bush to see what it was, but Lessing appeared to dislike the subject. I gathered he thought that to discuss the smell of decomposing flesh is bad taste. To Jane's question my

answer was that I hadn't wanted to get any closer to the stench than I had accidentally found myself, but that was only the answer I gave her; inside I was thinking: Because without you, *you, Jane*, I am a man going from A to B and never finding B any more pleasant than A: ad infinitum: if I had *you* with me every inch of the way would be a progress of pleasure and interest and enjoyment; we'd have gone into those dusty thorns together with handkerchiefs over our noses and as a result we'd know something now that we don't, as it happens, because you weren't with me.

Somewhere along the way we'd have made love. Lessing wouldn't have; he'd wait for a locking door, a bed, a bathroom, convention. *I hate Lessing* . . .

I was feeling slightly tight. I was saying to Jane: "I didn't want to get any closer than I had to. It was really a horrible smell." Lessing stared at me oddly and Jane looked puzzled. It struck me that perhaps I'd said it before and that they'd been talking about something else while I'd been thinking about how a trip like this one could be something not far short of heaven if I had Jane with me; about making love to her which was Lessing's right and not mine, had never been mine . . . which was as good a reason as any for hating him.

What's the phrase: 'in the sight of God'? In that sight, according to man's interpretation and conventions, she belonged to this flaccid creature who was sipping his whisky and staring at me as if I was a specimen of something interesting but repulsive under glass. I wondered if God would subscribe to such an interpretation of His sight. It occurred to me that I might be mentally blaspheming, but I knew I'd rather die damned than live without Jane.

I told Lessing: "I'm planning to leave quite early, tomorrow. An early breakfast, and take sandwiches for lunch. Probably spend the evening at Lilongwe." Lessing nodded, slowly. Jane was absolutely still, looking

down into her empty glass. I was reminded of my duty as a host. I didn't want any more to drink for myself; I was afraid I'd talk too much or too little, but I'd issued the invitation. I beckoned the waiter. Lessing bent forward and raised one of his soft, white hands, and I wondered if he drove in gloves, to keep them that colour.

"If you please, this will be my turn. Then I think I should like to have dinner." He told the waiter: "A John Collins, a gin and bitters, and a whisky with soda." The waiter looked at me and back again at Lessing.

"Two soda?" I nodded, and he went. Lessing told me: "We will meet again tomorrow evening, then, Mr Carpenter. I have made reservations at Lilongwe." His glance drifted slowly across to Jane. "It seems we shall be meeting Mr Carpenter quite frequently, my dear."

Jane didn't look up or answer. I told Lessing: "I've made no bookings at all, so I may not stay in Lilongwe, if they're full up."

He looked surprised. "Is that not rather unwise? With such a shortage of hotels . . ." A different expression came into his eyes. "Perhaps it is that your plans to come through Nyasaland were made at very short notice? Last night, for instance?" He thought he had me there; he was watching me closely, waiting to pounce on an unsatisfactory answer. I frowned, looking right back at him as if I'd no idea what he was getting at.

"I don't know what you mean by that. I wasn't making plans in Salisbury, I was on my way through. I travel a great deal, all over this part of Africa; my car's a station-wagon and I have bedding in it. It's really very comfortable. I have a small paraffin stove, too, and quite a lot of tinned food, so I can stop right out in the bush if I feel like it."

"Then"—he was smiling—"why bother with hotels at all, Mr Carpenter?" Again he glanced at Jane. "I wonder why he bothers, my dear."

Jane said quietly, looking at me, not at her husband: "Why don't you ask him?"

I laughed. "Where there *is* a decent hotel and it's convenient to my route, and it has room for me, I use it. I prefer even hotel cooking to my own, and you'll probably agree that a bath is pleasant after a day's driving in this climate." I went on, talking to Jane because she was still looking at me and there was a faint smile on her lips; I told her, as the waiter set new drinks down on the table and Lessing reached for his wallet: "I don't like to be tied down to a schedule. I like to be free to stop when I feel like it, or to go on after dark if I want to . . . You know, I shouldn't have let you pay for these. You're my guests, this evening, I sent you a note . . ."

Lessing interrupted: "I imagine there will be plenty of opportunities for us to entertain each other between here and the coast."

I nodded, with enthusiasm, and smiled at Jane. "I hope so. That's another reason, of course, for my using hotels this time more than I might have in the ordinary way. They're dreary, on one's own. Apart from the hot water and that sort of thing, if you're by yourself it's really more pleasant to stay out of them. But with friends to drink and eat with, well . . ."

"By friends, Mr Carpenter, you mean my wife?"

I met the malice in his eyes. "Well, primarily, of course, you're right. We did know each other—and had other friends in common—quite a long time ago."

"You knew each other . . . *very* well?"

"Cape Town's a small place. You know it?" He nodded. I went on: "So one's circle of friends tends to be small, too, in consequence. I suppose the answer to your question is 'yes'."

Lessing nodded. He put down his empty glass and asked Jane: "Shall we go in?" We all stood up and he took her arm. He smiled at me. "It must be very pleasant for you

to meet again in this way. I can quite understand your wishing to see more of each other." Jane was turning away but he still held her upper arm, his fingers grossly white against her tan. He said: "I will do my best not to intrude on the reunion."

I was sick of this. Sick of his stupid slyness, almost physically sick at the sight of his hand on her. That hand loosened now, and she'd moved away; she was several paces from where we stood face to face and the Nyasa waiter watching us with deep, disinterested eyes. I kept my voice low so that Jane wouldn't hear it and I told her husband: "I appreciate that."

We went in to dinner. It wasn't a very lively meal. I bought a bottle of wine to brighten it up, but Lessing hardly touched his; Jane and I finished the bottle except for the one glass out of it that he didn't drink. In the long silences, looking at Jane, I kept thinking how perfect, how unbelievably wonderful, it would be if she and I were here together, she and I alone and no Lessing or anyone else. The thought of it was so ecstatically sweet that it brought me a sudden, morbid doubt that it would ever happen—a fear that it was too good a dream to come true and that the joy I'd had with Jane, years ago, was all I'd ever have.

But the dream *had* to come true.

It was Lessing who produced the surprise of the evening. We'd come out of the dining-room and we were standing on the veranda and I'd suggested we should have a liqueur. Jane said she'd love that. Lessing glanced at his watch.

"Would you think me rude if I left you to yourselves? I have a book which I would very much like to finish before I go to sleep. Would you mind, my dear?"

Jane said she wouldn't mind, and anyway she wouldn't be long. He told her not to hurry, and he said to me: "My wife does not care for reading in bed, whereas I enjoy it. I would rather she was enjoying herself down here and I

am free to read without my conscience telling me that I should switch off the light and not be selfish . . . Will you excuse me, Mr Carpenter?"

I did so, immediately. I certainly didn't want him to confide in me any further about his bed-time habits. He walked away without another word, and I was alone with Jane.

"Shall we sit here?" We did, and the waiter came up with a pleased grin on his face. The African is in most ways a simple soul: the fat Bwana who looked like a toad had taken himself off, and the young one who gave good tips was alone with the girl. The situation had resolved itself according to the Nyasa's liking and he showed his approval of it in a broad expanse of teeth. "Drink, Bwana?"

I smiled back at him—one savage to another. When he'd gone I told Jane: "I can hardly believe this. That I've got you to myself."

"I mustn't be long, Ted." She sounded nervous. But I had no need to pretend not to be staring at her now. I sat back and looked at her, drinking her in, experiencing just in that act of looking an excitement and delight almost painful in its intensity.

"Don't, Ted." But she was smiling. "Please don't. There's . . ."

"I love you, Jane. I've loved you from the second I saw you at that awful party and now I love you far more than I've ever done. I didn't have any idea that it was even possible to feel so violent an affection. . . . Sorry, that's a silly word. I've been wanting to say this to you ever since last night and I've put it badly. Shall I start again?"

"Don't be greedy. It's my turn." She was leaning back with her head turned towards me and her eyes half-closed. She told me: "I love you, too." I asked her to say it again and she did; she looked straight at me and said quietly: "I love you, Ted. I've never loved anyone else."

Her hand was on the arm of the chair and I leant over and put my hand over it. She said: "You must wonder how . . . about Felix."

"I don't give a damn about Felix!" I'd said it too loudly; she glanced round quickly, with that almost frightened look which was new to her. But there was nobody near enough to have heard. The waiter brought our drinks. When I'd paid him and he'd gone away again to the end of the veranda, I moved my chair closer to Jane's.

"Sorry. -I didn't mean to shout. . . . Listen, Jane. I want you. Please. I can't be without you, now that I've seen you again. That's not just a phrase; I mean it and it's true, I *can't*." My hand was on the incredibly smooth skin of her arm and, looking at it, I thought of Lessing. "I can't stand seeing his hands on you."

"That's why he keeps touching me. You show things too easily in your face." She put her other hand across on to mine and pressed my fingers into her arm. "Ted, let's be serious for a minute."

"D'you think I've been making jokes?"

"I mean, *wise*. Will you do something for me? Something very difficult that you won't want to do?" I watched her eyes and waited to hear it. She told me: "Go on ahead, on your own. Don't keep along with us like you're doing."

"But . . ."

"Afterwards, Ted, after we get back from this trip, I'll leave Felix; I'll marry you or just live with you . . . anything . . . anywhere. I promise you. Only now, I can't stand this triangle business. It's not just that I can't stand it, it's dangerous, Ted, dangerous and pointless too . . . Please, Ted, *please* go on."

The idea of it appalled me. Oh, it was wise, logical; she was right, I was making a series of uncomfortable situations and I should have realised that for her they were

extremely unpleasant. With her promise in my ears I should have agreed, and gone on ahead at first light or even earlier. But when one is in love, logic is an also-ran. Leave her, when I had a chance of seeing her each evening, watching her lips move, hearing her voice?

"Jane, it's the impossible you're asking. Please *don't* ask it!"

"I have to, Ted. I want the same as you want, you know that. If you don't, you're blind. This—what you're doing now—it isn't only pointless, it's a danger to what we both want. Ted, we've complicated ourselves enough, the pair of us; now there's a chance to straighten it out, *please* don't let's risk messing it up again."

She was right, of course. I called the waiter and ordered the same drinks again. Jane stopped him, told me she'd rather have something long and cold without alcohol. We decided on orange juice, and pink gin for me. When the waiter'd gone, she asked me: "Will you do what I ask, Ted?"

"If I do, will you promise me now that whatever happens, whatever Lessing does, or threatens, or anything else no matter what . . . after we get back, you'll come to me straight away and marry me when we can?"

"I've already said so. You didn't have to ask."

"I do have to be sure of it. He'll do his damnedest . . . All right, Jane, I'll go on. I won't even be here for breakfast, I'll get as far as I can tomorrow and . . . where do I find you, after we're back?"

She gave me a Johannesburg telephone number and a post office box number, and I wrote them in my diary; then she leant across and kissed me and neither of us had seen the waiter until we heard him putting the drinks down on the table.

We talked about ordinary things then. She asked me about this journey I was making; she had a rough idea about it from the conversation in the 'Auberge Bleu', the

night before, but now she wanted to know how I worked, what sort of man was this Jimmy Townsend I was doing it for, how my last book had done and whether I had another on the way. I had, of course; writing travel books of localised interest may not be in the higher strata of literary activity, but the man who writes them is still a writer, and if you show me a writer who has nothing in production I will show you a man who may shortly be going round the bend. I told her about that; it had taken hold of me more strongly in the last couple of years. She said that after we'd sorted ourselves out she'd like me to write a novel, and that made me think of what Randy Craill had been talking about earlier in the evening. I didn't know if I could do it, but I liked the idea. Even more than that, I loved the idea of living with Jane and writing for that living. And for the second time that evening I had the feeling that I was thinking of something so good that it could only be a pipe-dream.

I asked Jane what her husband did for a living and what was the business he'd said he was doing while he was on this holiday with her. She told me that he had a lot of interests and that he was on the boards of several companies in Johannesburg. One of his latest promotions, it seemed, was a road transport business which his group had started only a few months ago, and he was looking in on their various depots and agencies. That rang a bell and I asked her: "African Road Haulage; is that its name?" I was remembering that vast pantechnicon with an unfamiliar name that had passed me on the road that morning in a shower of dirt. Jane looked startled; that *was* the name of the company, but how on earth did I know it? I told her. She still seemed surprised, and looked at me oddly as if she hardly accepted my explanation. A minute later we were talking of something else.

She never mentioned Penny's dying, or my not seeing her after it happened, and I didn't ask her any questions

about what she'd been doing since that time or how she'd met and married Lessing. Without discussing it at all we'd made a bargain that there was a period in each other's lives that wasn't going to be probed. In the back of my mind I wondered if it would be possible for two people to be married or live their lives together and to leave for ever that gap in their knowledge of each other's past. . . . Well, why not? Surely only the couples of the type to whom tabloid newspapers were fond of referring as 'Childhood Sweethearts' could know *everything* about each other. Come to think of it, it was a pretty good argument against 'Childhood Sweethearts' getting married.

While we talked it was dawning on me that a life which had been inordinately dull was going to become extraordinarily exciting. That I was going to have Jane: to have, and to hold. This fact had been obscured, at first, by the distaste I felt at knowing that I had to leave her in the morning. Well, not in the morning, tonight. But now, through that and through a certain blurring, a great sweet bell was ringing, an enormous *moment of truth* was extending into minutes as it grew in certainty . . . while the waiter watched for another order and, up there on the high roadside beyond the strip of lawn and rockery, a tall African was passing with his wife four paces behind him and their baby strapped on her back; they were in the glow of light from the hotel's veranda and now they'd padded out of it; Jane was looking at me and her soft lips were smiling.

"Long way off?"

"Oh, no. No, Jane. Very close. I was trying to take it in, that we—you and I—that we'll . . ."

"We will, Ted. Don't doubt it." I wanted to take her hand but the waiter was watching us. 'Don't doubt it,' but I still did. A line of someone's came to my mind: 'The coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave man dies

but one.' Why doubt? I hadn't before, not the outcome of what I'd deliberately set out to achieve. This was a silly time to start, a coward's time; the man was right. Jane said: "Ted, I have to go. I've stayed too long already."

We stood up and the waiter came quickly to pull Jane's chair out of her way. We wished him good night and he said something in his own language which I didn't understand. We went down the staircase past the reception office towards the foot of the staircase which I hated with all my heart, and Jane asked me: "What did he say?"

"He wished us luck."

She laughed. "A nice guess. It may have been something very critical."

"No." I took her arm. "He liked us. You could see it in his face."

"Nice to be liked . . . A reassurance, I suppose, to the Master Race."

"I dare say. But the people who really think they're the Master Race, the crowd that rules down south, don't want to be liked. They'd rather be feared."

"I wonder why."

"Because they're afraid."

We were at the foot of the stairs and Jane had one foot on the first of them. She said: "You won't forget to come and find me, will you?"

I turned her round to face me. "That's the first stupid thing I've ever heard you say." *Those bloody stairs. . .*

"You aren't alone in needing reassurance, Ted."

There were only about three people in the pub and Craill was one of them. He seemed reasonably sober so I imagine he'd been somewhere for food and come back again. He was playing darts against himself and marking up the two scores meticulously on either side of the board. He asked me if I'd like to play; the two of us, he said, would constitute a foursome. If I hadn't been able to

strike the double a couple of hours ago, I doubted if I'd even land one on the wall, now, so I declined the challenge. He left his game where it stood and joined me at the bar and I bought drinks. I asked him if he spent all his evenings in this way, and he told me no, sometimes he read a book or wrote letters and there had even been occasions when he'd had to work late in his office. None of this answered the question I'd been aiming at so I put it more directly.

"What does your wife do while you're busy like this?"

He goggled at me. "Don't you know? Didn't I tell you?" I shook my head and he said: "I must be getting a grip on myself. That's very, very pleasing. There's *someone* in Blantyre I haven't told." He raised his glass and stared at it. "I've told everyone else, I'm sure of it. Perfect strangers, and people I know but don't usually talk to. I've told them all! My tongue moves of its own volition and bores them all stiff, and I dare say that's why this bar is as empty as it is tonight. . . . Ted, you've given me hope. Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

"Actually she's . . ." he paused, and I could see that he was trying not to tell me. That expression of resolution faded, to be replaced by a rather sloppy smile. "She's in Salisbury, having a baby . . . well, oh, damn it . . . you see, our doctor thought she'd be better there; you know, facilities, all that sort of thing. I'm flying down at the week-end, they're due then."

"They?"

The smile got even sloppier. "The doctor said so, Ted. Twins."

"Good Lord!"

"That's what *I* said. . . . Shall we have another drink?"

Two rounds later I got him off the subject of his forthcoming family and back to the slave trade. Jane's suggestion that I should write a novel appealed to me very

much indeed and, while I've always thought that I was lacking in imaginative powers, this subject really gripped me. Craill had read a lot about it, and he'd made a trip once into a remote part of Portuguese East, looking for traces; but, when the officials there heard that he was a newspaper man and he'd unwisely told one of them over a jug of wine what he was after, they'd escorted him politely but firmly back to the border. He knew the East Coast too, he'd spend a camping holiday at Bagamoyo, where the slave trail ended and the human cargo was loaded into dhows.

He'd picked up a lot of details that I'd never heard or read about, and my imagination was working as it never had before. While he talked I could see the whole thing not only clearly but graphically, and not only the story, not only the fact that I was going to write it; we'd come up here, Jane and I, and I'd write it on the spot.

I even had the title: *Bagamoyo*. It's the name of a place but it means, 'Where I leave my heart behind.'

TED'S STORY-VII

I DIDN'T GET AWAY FROM BLANTYRE as early as I'd hoped. When I'd thought of missing breakfast and leaving at first light, I'd been overlooking the fact that I wouldn't be able to pay my bill until the reception office opened; I should, of course, have done it the night before, and then I could have left whenever it suited me.

I was up early and packed, and checked up on the map and in the guide book about the country I'd be driving through that day. I got into the dining-room as soon as the head waiter unlocked its doors, and I gulped down some fried eggs and coffee and hurried out again, but there still wasn't anyone to take my money. It wasn't until I'd loaded the suitcases into the car that the girl appeared.

By the time I was able to leave the hotel, the shops were open; so I drove to a garage and, while they filled the Dodge's tank and topped up the oil and air, I went into their spares department and bought a new fanbelt to carry as spare. The sun was well up now, and it was getting hot, and I was worried that Jane and Lessing might have breakfasted quickly or even in their room earlier on, and be leaving at about this same time. But as I drove out fast along the Zomba road I saw no sign of them.

It wouldn't have mattered, really, but I was anxious that Jane should know I was keeping my promise to her. They'd be spending the night at Lilongwe, only about two hundred and forty miles away, but, with a ferry to cross and an indifferent road surface, that made a reasonable day's run; for myself, to get a good lead on them I wanted

to make Kasungu, eighty-four miles farther on. There was a Rest House, one of the government places, at Kasungu, and even if there wasn't a room for me I'd be able to get a bath, I supposed, and sleep in the car. From there I could leave at dawn the next morning with a head start, stop somewhere near Fort Hill for the night after that, and then go right through to Iringa, at which time Lessing, given normal daily progress, would be only in Mbeya, a whole day's driving behind me. It was a sound plan and I didn't see why it shouldn't work.

It seemed odd, all the same, that I should be making plans to get away from Jane, when only this time yesterday I was thinking out ways of keeping level with her. . . .

The road to Zomba wasn't at all bad, and I was passing through the place, which incidentally is the capital of Nyasaland and fairly crawls with Civil Servants, within an hour of leaving Blantyre. From here there were thirty-three miles down to the Shire river, at Liwonde; I'd crossed one loop of the Shire yesterday, between Mwanza and Blantyre, over that iron bridge, but at Liwonde the river is wide and there's a ferry. Or rather, a pont—a raft, big enough to take four cars—and the crew haul it over by running up and down its sides, and dragging on the cables. On this trip it carried my Dodge, a van driven by an Indian and full of something in sacks that smelt like manure, and about forty Africans with bicycles, suitcases and bundles of Lord knows what. On the other bank there was an even bigger crowd of them, milling around a sort of tea-room where they were buying oranges and fizzy drinks. It was a very colourful scene, so I stopped and took a photograph of it. I took one of the river, too, which was as flat and shiny as greased glass, very still and peaceful, reflecting upside-down and with astonishing clarity the palms along its banks. They were Borassus palms mostly, fifty or sixty feet high, with the dead fronds hanging down alongside the upper part of their trunks.

Now the road climbed north-westwards out of the Shire valley towards Ncheu, fifty miles away and two thousand feet higher. The road surface was a pleasant surprise—only earth, but there were no holes in it and no corrugations and very few stones—and those people in Salisbury who'd told me how bad it was obviously hadn't any idea what they were talking about. I found that I could keep up a very good speed on the straight, but when the road swung and turned, which it did pretty often, I had to go more carefully because I found that the Dodge had a tendency to skid on the loose topsoil. For all that, it was a great deal better than I'd expected. Now and then there was a lump of rock pushing up through the earth; as it always showed itself too late to be avoided, the shock-absorbers would crash painfully and the car would shudder in the agony of it: but then, yesterday, on the Portuguese road, this had happened twice a minute.

It was just after noon when I got to Ncheu. My road was joined here by one from the left, a more direct route from Blantyre, but they'd told me in the hotel that its surface was bad and that's why I'd taken the longer route. Ncheu, like most Nyasaland villages, is just a long straggle of huts and native trading stores on both sides of the road; Africans were working at sewing-machines outside their doors, and scrawny-looking chickens meandered about the road, scattering with loud squawks of terror when I blew my horn at them.

That was Ncheu. A few miles out to the north I had a choice of roads: I could stay on this one, or take a slightly longer route that branched off to the right, a road that climbs high so that, according to my guide book, from the top of it one can see twenty miles to Lake Nyasa. From the point of view of my duty to Jimmy Townsend I should, I suppose, have gone that way, in case the scenery was worth recording in colour; but my promise to Jane was more important than any pamphlet, so I stayed on the lower

road, heading into country which the book described as 'flat and uninteresting'. Reading it in the hotel early that morning, I'd wondered if such a phrase couldn't be applied to nine-tenths of the roads of South and Central Africa. Certainly this stretch was no duller than most of the two-thousand-odd miles I'd covered in the past week.

As things turned out, it was an eventful fifty miles, this road from Ncheu to Dedza. The first incident concerned an African on a bicycle. There are, of course, many thousands of Africans in this part of the world, and a large proportion of them have bicycles. While I know that in suggesting this I shall incur the wrath and condemnation of all sorts of far-away people, including the British Labour Party, it is my conviction that no African should be allowed to ride a bicycle unless he has a man on foot, carrying a red flag, at each end of the machine, and another running backwards beside him in order to convey to him in simple terms what traffic is approaching from the rear.

I came round a wide, gentle bend, and saw this cyclist about half a mile ahead of me, riding on the extreme right-hand edge of the road and going in the same direction as I was. As soon as I saw him, I began to give gentle, regular toots on the horn. This is most necessary, because if one approaches too close to an African cyclist before hooting, the odds are that he will let go of the handle-bars, throw his arms up in the air and fling himself into the path of the oncoming car. On a narrow road this manoeuvre can have disastrous consequences, particularly when the cyclist is so skilled in the technique that he can delay his plunge to the last possible moment.

I approached cautiously, reducing speed and hooting every few yards. The man continued to ride very slowly along on the wrong side of the road: as I came closer, still hooting in short, regular bleeps, I saw that there was a group of fifteen or twenty Africans on the left of the road, that is on the far side of it from the cyclist, and that he was

chatting to them. I felt certain that he'd have heard my horn by now, and the fact that several of the people in the group on the other side were looking straight at me confirmed this impression. I assumed that the man intended remaining on the right-hand verge until I'd passed him.

Yet, as I did pass, it became all too evident that he had not previously been aware of my presence; he uttered a loud cry, swung violently inwards and rode at speed into my rear right mudguard. In an effort to avoid his suicidal rush I had swung the car to the left and then right; the Dodge went into a skid, ploughed off the road and buried its nose in a drift of soft earth.

I got out, expecting to find a badly damaged African. He had, however, remounted his bicycle, and was pedalling away up the hill almost as if he'd expected to be chased. I shouted at him, whereupon he turned his machine and raced back; on arrival, he fell on his knees in the middle of the road and began to implore my forgiveness. This was a highly unusual reaction; in most parts of the country, he and all his friends would by now be throwing stones at me.

I told him that I'd forgive him, but that he and his friends would have to assist me in getting the car back into the road. In that soft earth the wheels wouldn't grip, and it would have to be pushed. The bicycle man rose to his feet and shouted a command to his friends. I got into the car and started the engine. I noticed, meanwhile, that none of the men of the party had moved, but that all the women had gathered in front of the car's bonnet. They began to push, and after a few attempts the car suddenly lurched backwards; I engaged the clutch, and accelerated; the wheels spun madly, then gripped; a moment later the Dodge was back in the road astride the marks of its skid, dirtied but undented. I asked the cyclist if he was hurt by his fall, and he assured me, grinning, that he was not.

THE YELLOW FORD

"Goodabye, sank you, Bwana! Goodabye!"

I returned the farewell, and was about to set off when I saw that for the moment this was impossible. I spoke to the fellow through the driving window. "Bicycle in front of car!"

"Ah!" He chuckled, shaking his head as if he was wondering how it had got there. In fact, it was where he'd dropped it, right in the middle of the road. He called to one of the women, who sprang forward and dragged it out of the way. I thanked him, and he gave me a semi-military salute as I put the car into gear and drew away northwards.

Just a few miles on I found an unusually large tree, with leaves on it, growing beside the road. It threw a wide patch of shade, so I drove the car under it and stopped to eat my Blantyre sandwiches and drink warm water from a bottle. It was now mid-afternoon. This snack only took a few minutes to dispose of; I lit a pipe, and got going again. Within a hundred yards of starting there was a loud whistling noise from the offside front tyre; the shrill hiss of it faded as I stopped the car, and by the time I'd got out to look at it the tyre was flat.

I got the back open, unroped the gear, and got out the jack and wheelbrace and the spare tyre. I worked as fast as I could because at any moment that yellow Ford might come up behind me, with Lessing at its wheel, and Jane perhaps thinking that I'd gone slowly on purpose and let her down. I was hours behind schedule—not even at Dedza yet and from there I'd still have another hundred-and-fifty miles to Kasungu. I got the spare bolted on, let the car down again, and stowed everything back where it belonged. I couldn't afford another puncture now, because I only had that one spare.

I went into Dedza and out the other side of it much too fast for the chickens, who filled the air with flying feathers. Dedza is very much like Ncheu, except that it has a hotel,

set back to the right against huge granite boulders. Perhaps there is more to the place than this, but if there is I didn't see it. The road fell slightly and I crossed a small river by way of a timber bridge which was tied together with liana; then the road flattened out and just over an hour later I was driving up the main street of Lilongwe. I went straight to the garage at the other end of it, opposite the hotel, and asked them if they could mend my punctured tyre in a hurry. They said they could, and I asked, how long? Half-an-hour? Perhaps, perhaps an hour, perhaps a little longer; you never knew, with tubeless tyres, until you took them apart. I opened the back of the car and rolled out the tyre; I took out the jack and the wheelbrace, too, because if I had any more punctures I didn't want to have to unpack everything again. I told the mechanic I'd be back in half-an-hour and walked over to the hotel.

I cleaned myself up in the washroom, then went to the reception desk and asked if they could get me some sandwiches made, to take with me. The girl told me that she doubted it, since the dining-room was shut, but that she'd see what she could do. I told her I'd come back presently, and went into the bar to wash the dust out of my throat. It would have been more restful to stretch out in one of the easy chairs in the lounge, but if I'd done that I couldn't have helped meeting Lessing if he did arrive, so I hid myself in the public bar. I drank two bottles of beer and smoked a pipe, and that filled the half-hour. But as I was about to leave it struck me that nobody could have fixed a tubeless tyre in this time; I got back on to the same stool, bought another beer and lit a fresh pipe.

Then for a second time I set off for the reception office, to ask about the sandwiches, and for a second time a thought stopped me. It was that before I went back in there I might as well check whether Jane and her husband had in fact arrived. So I went out of the other door instead,

and out to the front of the hotel. . . . The yellow Ford was by itself, over on the far side of the tarred park.

It looked empty, and had a locked-up-for-the-night look about it. In any case, Lessing would only have parked it over there after they'd got the luggage out, so I could assume that he and Jane were settled in the hotel. I could also assume that by leaving those sandwiches, if they had been made, I wouldn't be doing the hotel any harm; they could sell them to Lessing in the morning. I walked quickly across the car park and over the road to the garage.

It was, I think, the first time I'd ever gone to collect a car and found it ready. They'd even put the tyres back in their right places, the spare inside and the mended one on the right front wheel. The spare—that is, the one I'd put on in place of the punctured tyre—was a bit smooth, so they'd decided to switch them back to where they had been. They told me they'd put a tube in the mended tyre, just to make sure. That struck me as unnecessary, but it was too late to argue. I had the tank filled, checked the oil, and that was that.

As things had turned out—I mean that I'd got away with it without meeting Lessing—I was thankful that I'd taken the risk of stopping, because it seemed doubtful that I'd find another properly equipped garage this side of Mbeya. This was a sort of 'point of no return'—a matter of trusting to luck and hoping that nothing serious would go wrong in the next two days.

It was getting dark as I drove out of Lilongwe, heading north towards Kasungu. I suppose it was the effect of the long day's drive with its interruptions and annoyances and the worry of being behind schedule—that and three bottles of rather heavy beer on top of it—that made me feel sleepy after I'd driven half-a-dozen miles. I felt as I had that first day out of Salisbury; my eyes kept trying to shut and I was tempted to stop there on the roadside and let them have their own way. But I kept going, blinking wearily

into the beams of the headlights, feeling that it was somehow important to put a good few miles between me and Lilongwe.

Thirty miles was all I managed. By that time I was almost asleep and to go on would have been dangerous. I was not only tired, but hungry, too, with a hollow feeling not unlike pain in my stomach. I found a place where there was a wide verge to the road and no bank, and I drove the Dodge cautiously up to the edge of the bush. It wasn't right off the road but there was plenty of room for anyone to have passed.

I considered making a fire and heating food and coffee, but I was too tired to bother with it. I got out a tin of baked beans, the sort in tomato sauce, and ate the whole lot with a spoon, straight out of the tin. Washing-up consisted of throwing the tin away and licking the spoon clean. Then I spread my bedding in the back of the Dodge, and turned in.

I didn't sleep well at first; hyenas, or wild dogs, were kicking up an awful din. Their weird screams came from every direction, and once, just as I was dropping into sleep, I was woken up by the most blood-curdling noise: it sounded as if a pack of them were fighting, close by the car. I got up and shone a torch out of the window, but I couldn't see anything. I lay down again and thought about Jane, about how wonderful it was all going to be. That led me to thinking of the novel I was going to write, this story about the slave trade. Remembering what Craill had told me, and having a picture of the route map fairly clearly in my mind, I realised that here, where I was spending the night, must have been right in the middle of the slavers' hunting-grounds. Only about fifty miles north-east of this spot was the lake shore at Kota Kota, which was the port of embarkation for the lake crossing. It would, I imagined, have been for most of the slaves a first experience of sea travel, and for all of them a small fore-

taste of that much longer voyage from Bagamoyo to the Persian Gulf. . . . I began to try and work out some rough 'shape' for my novel, so that when next I saw Jane I could tell her all about it; and it was probably this effort at concentration that put me to sleep.

When I woke it was still dark, but my watch indicated that dawn couldn't be far off; I'd slept for several hours.

I switched on the car's headlights and looked around for dry wood; there was plenty of it, all over the place. When I had a large enough heap of it, I cleared all the leaves and brushwood and dry weed off a large patch of ground and built a fire in the centre. It blazed up at once and I fed it with greener wood until it was glowing good and hot, with the flames not too high. Then I switched off the car's lights and dug out a tin of sausages and one of the small ones of baked beans, and made my breakfast. I made coffee, too. By the time I'd eaten it, dawn was breaking from the direction of Lake Nyasa and I had such a glow of contentment in me that I was thinking I'd like to breakfast in just this way every day of my life. It was a silly thought, of course, and I only record it as an indication of the feeling of extreme well-being which I had. The bush was dead-quiet and a silver-pink light made it lovely; you can't say it was an artificial or untrue loveliness because who knows in what light the bush was made to be looked at? After all, the creatures that live in it ought to know, and they see it almost entirely at night. During the day, they sleep. It has often occurred to me that while the brains of animals are mostly smaller and less complicated than our own, the animals make things pretty well even by not burdening the multitudinous cells of those brains with all sorts of things which haven't any real importance at all. Thus their intelligence is directed at the things that do matter, such as sleeping when it's hot and looking at things when they're beautiful.

Daylight came during the first twenty miles of the day's drive. It was one of the most splendid stretches I've ever covered, shadowed and shaded and multi-coloured; then suddenly it was day and dust and grey-brown bush and there was very little beauty anywhere, least of all in the driving-mirror in which I saw a dirty, ginger-stubbed face glaring back at me through dust-reddened eyes.

Kasungu: and a notice-board which told me, **REST HOUSE CLOSED**. For some reason, this information pleased me. Now, ninety-eight miles to Mzimba. From Mzimba, another hundred to Rumpi, and from there another hundred and fifty to Fort Hill. I had to cover as much of that distance as I could, because I'd promised Jane that I'd stay away from her now in order that I could spend the rest of my life *with* her. I didn't know why it was necessary, but she thought it was; she'd been very sure of it and, for some reason, I believed in her certainty. It's odd; we laugh at witch-doctors and scoff at primitive magic; yet we believe, many of us, in ghosts (even if we don't admit a belief we are frightened, most of us, to be in certain places at certain times) and those of us who have much to do with intelligent women do not ignore their powers of intuition. What I'm getting at is that I felt Jane's insistence on my keeping away from her and Lessing to be a product of her intuition and nothing else.

I have a friend, a man who lacks imagination to a remarkable degree, who recounted to me in great detail how he was once the guest of an African tribal gathering which had been organised to put an end to a drought; he told me how he'd sat and watched a throwing of bones and the ceremonial slaughtering of an ox, and listened to an incantation (not in the tribe's language—nobody, not even the Chief, had known what the old man was chanting) addressed to a little white cloud the size of a child's hand low down on the edge of a clear blue sky . . . and, while the young men danced, that tiny white cloud grew and

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turned black and covered the whole sky, and rain fell within the hour and never stopped in a week.

I mention this by way of justifying myself in that I was following, blindly, the dictates of a woman's intuition, which, when you think about it, is only a sort of mental bone-throwing.

I was about half-way to Mzimba when I heard a sound that was unpleasantly familiar; I'd heard it only the day before. It was a loud, whistling hiss and it came from the rear offside-tyre instead of the front one; that was the only difference. I stopped quickly, so as not to damage the tyre more than I could help, and when I got out to look at its flatness I realised that I hadn't pulled in to the side of the road as I should have done. There might have been room for another car to pass, but only just.

I was glad I'd thought of leaving the jack and wheel-brace out of the tool box; it saved me having to unpack everything all over again. I got them out and set the jack under the rear bumper and looked round for the steel bar that fits into the socket of the jack in order to pump the thing up. But it wasn't there; I must have left it inside the car. I went back to get it but it wasn't in sight. I searched around between the cases but it must have been somewhere behind them, so I had to take the lashings off, after all.

I still couldn't find it, so I took everything out of the car, one case at a time. When I had all the cases and boxes and cartons and the spare petrol cans out in the road, I began to realise that this very essential part of the jack was no longer with me. I supposed that in the garage at Lilongwe they must have used my jack when they switched the tyres round, and not put everything back.

Well, it shouldn't be too difficult to find something that would fit into the socket and be long and strong enough to do the job. I opened the tool box and ferreted about in

it. The only possible implement was the longest spanner; one claw of it might be narrow enough to get into the jack and take a grip. It didn't; I could only get the point in. It began to dawn on me that I was in trouble.

I took a screwdriver out of the kit, opened the bonnet of the car and searched for some suitably-sized part that I could detach. There wasn't one. There were a couple of rods that I could have taken out simply by removing the split-pins in the joints, but they were far too light; they'd certainly have bent and quite possibly snapped.

I'd have to cut some sort of stick. First I re-stowed all the boxes, because the road looked untidy with them standing about on it. Then I got my knife out of the glove-pocket and looked around. I could see about a mile of road in each direction. I was in the lowest part of a shallow depression, the road rising behind me and in front, and my vision was cut off by the blind rise at each end. On either side were low, scrubby bush, high yellow-brown grass and thorn. There wasn't a proper tree anywhere.

I spent an hour or more scouring the surrounding countryside for a piece of wood. It had to be reasonably straight and strong. The thickness wouldn't have mattered, because I could have pared it down to size at one end. When I eventually gave up the search, all I had to show for it were scratches and bloodstains from thorns. There was simply nothing that I could use; for want of a piece of steel eighteen inches long and half an inch in diameter, I was stuck. I cursed myself for not having checked the equipment before leaving Lilongwe; it's a normal precaution and I not only felt a fool, I knew I was one. All I could do was wait for assistance and hope it came before the yellow Ford. . . . I climbed into the car and lit a pipe.

The next two hours passed slowly. It was hot and got hotter as the sun climbed and passed overhead. I developed a crick in the neck from twisting my head round to stare at

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the empty mile of dirt behind me; from smoking all the time, my tongue felt raw.

Then something that looked like a tall ant appeared on the rise ahead. It wavered about the road from side to side but gradually grew as it came closer down the long slope, until I could see that it was a man on a bicycle. It was pleasant to have something in sight that moved, but I couldn't see in it any likelihood of salvation. After a long time a tall, elderly African dismounted in front of me. I'd got out to meet him. He greeted me in his own language and it was obvious right from the start that we weren't going to understand each other. There was no tool kit on his bicycle, either. He listened attentively when I spoke, then gazed sadly around at the bush and shook his head. But there was a ray of hope; he began to point in the direction in which he'd been going, and repeating a word which at first I couldn't catch. Then I did: it was 'Mission'. I tore a page out of a notebook and wrote on it, in clear capitals, what it was I needed. The man put the note in his trouser pocket. I pointed at my pipe and asked him: "You smoke?" Out of the same pocket he pulled a blackened pipe and nodded fiercely, and I filled it from my pouch and handed him a box of matches. He lit it, said something I couldn't understand, and pedalled away towards the horizon in a cloud of blue smoke.

I had small hopes of any successful outcome to this attempt. The mission station might be five miles away, or fifty, and this was no sprint cyclist. It was a straw at which I'd clutched. I got back into the car and re-lit my own pipe and waited for night to fall. I could have made myself something to eat, but it was too hot to bother and I was too depressed to feel hunger.

Another hour crept by, and in the driving mirror I saw something white on the crest of the hill. I got out of the car and watched it grow, and still it was only a vaguely white and circular shape approaching down the centre of

the road. Then I heard the popping of a motor-cycle engine, and a few minutes later I saw that it was indeed a motor-cycle and that there was a heavily-built man in a white smock astride it. I waved at him and he waved back. Presently I was shaking hands with a stocky, red-faced missionary priest who spoke broken English, wore a cassock of some coarse, off-white material, and above it a wide-brimmed cowboy hat which was secured by a boot-lace knotted under his chin. The African who'd taken my note to him had been riding pillion and now stood gazing earnestly at the flat tyre.

I began to thank the missionary for coming, but he ignored me. He bent and peered at the jack, which still sat uselessly under the rear bumper, then nodded wisely to himself and detached a small tin box from the side of his machine. He had the tool, all right; as he pulled it out of the box I put out my hand to take it from him, but he turned brusquely away and flung himself down in the earth road beside the jack. As he did this, he pulled back his soutane, revealing a pair of khaki shorts, thick hairy legs and Army boots. He began to pump the car up off the ground, whistling between his teeth.

We had the spare on very quickly. While we worked—I say we, but he did most of it, elbowing me out of the way—I learnt that he was a Dutchman and that he was building a new church at his station in the bush. I asked him, diffidently and expecting a rebuff, if he'd accept a donation towards the cost of it, and he accepted a pound note with a grunt of pleasure. I gave his pillion passenger two half-crowns, and these the missionary very swiftly commandeered, taking them from his parishioner and dropping them into the pocket of his shorts. I attempted a speech of thanks for all they'd done, but he cut it short by roaring with laughter and slapping me hard on the back. The next moment he was put-putting up the road, with the African clutching him around his ample waist. I felt I'd learnt

something, but I hadn't yet worked out just what it was.

Now I was on the move again. There wasn't a hope of making up the lost time; I was more than four hours' driving behind where I should have been, and to catch up I'd have needed to drive until midnight. This I was most certainly not going to attempt; I'd do well if I reached Rumpi, about a hundred and fifty miles away. There was a government Rest House there and I'd use it, enjoy a bath and let them cook my food for me. I was dirty, unshaved, bad-tempered, hungry and tired, and if Lessing, too, was aiming for Rumpi, well, that was just too bad. Jane's intuition was one thing, and I'd done my best to please her, but it seemed to me that a more powerful witch-doctor named Fate, by Bad Luck out of Stupidity (my own), was throwing a different set of bones.

I hardly thought Lessing *could* be going to Rumpi. If he had been, he'd surely have passed me while I was stuck. I thought he was probably close behind me, but planning to stop at the Rest House at Mzimba. It was unlikely that either of those two places would have their rooms full, unless there'd been a spate of travellers from the north, because to my certain knowledge not one car had come up this way during the day.

I drove as hard as I could, risking skids on the bends. The road was smooth earth and I made good time, although I was expecting at any moment to hear another tyre go. Bad luck often comes in threes and I'd only had two, so far. Since I didn't have a spare tyre now, the next one would constitute a jackpot, and it seemed unlikely that in such an event I'd be rescued by another missionary of the calibre of that Dutchman. In my mind he was rapidly sprouting wings under his cassock, and the cowboy hat was beginning to look like a halo. I would have liked to know him better; he'd be an interesting man to drink with.

The red earth swam up like a river that rose behind me

in a cloud of dust, the sun went down in streaks of savage colour on the left, and the redness of the road faded through khaki into grey. I had the lights on well before I got to Rumpi and by that time I was certain that Lessing would have stopped at Mzimba; if he had, it meant that I could leave early with a start of close on a hundred miles. Without punctures, I'd be all right; I could make good my promise to Jane after all. As I thought of it, I crossed my fingers on the steering-wheel. There was a notice-board in my headlights; it said REST HOUSE and under that an arrow pointing to the right. I turned that way and then left and up to the scattering of white buildings. There was a light burning in the biggest of them, but there were no cars in the parking area.

The central building, the one with the light, comprised the dining-room, veranda and kitchen. In each of the others was a double room with its own bathroom. I learnt this from the African attendant, caretaker, whatever he was, who came out to meet me and seemed pleased to have something to do. I suppose a week could easily go by without anyone stopping. He took the one case I needed over to the smaller building on the left and, as I followed him into it, the size and layout of the place astonished me. There was an entrance space inside the front door, all surrounded with mosquito gauze, and that led into a good-sized room with two beds in it. There was a bathroom off that, and the water that came out of the tap was hot. It had its own cistern and a furnace outside the bathroom wall, and they kept the fire stoked, he told me, in case people arrived unexpectedly. After last night in the car, and the day as it had been, I felt pampered.

The boy asked me if I wanted supper; he led me over to the main building, unlocked a cupboard, and invited me to select what I wanted. It was all tinned stuff and I settled for sausages and beans, to be preceded by soup (mushroom) and followed by fruit salad. I told him I'd be ready

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for it in an hour and hurried back to the hot water.

I shaved and then climbed into the bath. At first, it was wonderful, but after I'd been basking in it for about five minutes, I heard a car arrive. I shouldn't have let this spoil my enjoyment; after all, there were more than two cars in Nyasaland. But I worried; I listened to car doors slamming and I tried to hear voices, but couldn't. I wanted to get out at once and look, but I forced myself to add hot water and lie there for another few minutes. The pleasure had gone; I dried myself and put on a clean shirt and slacks and went out into the dark.

By the filtered radiance that shone from the windows of the central building—there was no electric power, only pressure lamps—I could see a car parked not far from mine. From here it was only a car, about the same length as the Dodge. I walked slowly across bare earth between white-painted stones; my route took me past both cars. One was mine, the other Lessing's.

TED'S STORY-VIII

LESSING WAS IN THE VERANDA of the central building, sitting by himself in the curved part of it with a pressure lamp on the sill behind and above him. He'd been reading a paper-back novel and, as I came in, he threw it down on the table in front of him; an unopened bottle of Scotch whisky and three glasses and a jug of water were on the table. I was surprised to see that, because in Blantyre I'd gained the impression that he was less interested in alcohol than I was, and I've never bothered to carry the stuff with me.

His smile was broad. "What a pleasant surprise, Carpenter! We quite thought you had deserted us, until the boy showed us your name. Please sit down and have some whisky, won't you?"

I thanked him and sat down, while he poured generous tots into two of the glasses. I added water for us both. He told me: "My wife will be with us in a minute. Please wait until she comes before you tell us where you have been. You see, we were expecting to meet you last night, at that place . . . oh . . ."

"Lilongwe?"

"Of course. Lilongwe. Such peculiar names they have for these places up here. Well, your health!"

"Cheers!" The first swallow of whisky made me feel much better. I wondered what was making Lessing so genial this evening; he seemed relaxed, almost gay in his manner. I told him: "I've had a hell of a day. Stuck on the road for most of it. I thought you'd pass me, but when

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I got going again and you hadn't appeared, I thought you'd probably be stopping at Mzimba. So it's a surprise for me, too."

He nodded, and I noticed that he'd almost finished his drink. He asked me, solicitously: "Your car is all right again, though? You were able to effect repairs?"

I was about to answer him when Jane appeared through the mesh door. She was wearing a cotton frock with a cardigan over it; the air was surprisingly cool, after the heat of the day. Lessing and I stood up and as she came over to us she gave me a quiet, puzzled look; there was a small frown of anxiety between her eyes that made me want to kiss her and tell her not to worry about her intuition, that everything was going to be all right. I couldn't very well do that. I pulled back a chair for her and Lessing was saying: "Our friend has had a breakdown, that is all I have learnt so far. I asked him to wait until you joined us so that we could both hear his excuses for not meeting us last night. A little whisky, my dear?" He poured her some and, while I was putting water in it and she watching to say 'when', I noticed that he was giving himself another heavy tot. I put the jug down and he leant across the table with the bottle in his hand. "You must not drink so slowly, Carpenter. This is my opportunity to return the hospitality which I have enjoyed on two occasions."

I was certain the man hadn't been born British. There was no trace of accent but he spoke as if he had an English Grammar in his hip-pocket; as if he mentally checked the correct intonation for each word before he let it out. I swallowed what was left in my glass and he gave me more.

I told them all that had happened to me since I last saw them. I didn't mention, of course, that I'd seen their car at Lilongwe; in fact I gave them the impression that I'd been there much earlier in the day than I had and that I'd spent the night somewhere near Kasungu. Jane was

amused by my account of the breakdown, and the description I gave them of the missionary and his intervention made her laugh aloud. She turned and looked at me while she laughed, the first time she'd even glanced at me since she'd sat down, and I had a pleasant sensation of relief; she was with me, not with Lessing; everything was going to be all right. Lessing either had a different sense of humour from mine and hers, or he had none at all, because while he was obviously interested in my account he certainly didn't see anything funny in it. Yet he remained strangely pleasant and easy in his manner, and I wondered if perhaps my not stopping at Lilongwe had reassured him about my intentions towards his wife. Then, perhaps she'd helped—made him think that she'd been glad to be left alone with him. Whatever it was that had done it, the man's hackles were flat for the first time since I'd met him.

He even suggested: "Since you find yourself in the vulnerable position of having no spare wheel, it might be as well, I think, if we should drive in convoy at least until you have had it repaired?"

I shook my head, quickly. "It's nice of you, but I'm a bit behind now, and I'd rather get on as fast as I can."

Lessing smirked and waved a hand at nothing, unless it was a mosquito I hadn't seen. "Please don't think I am boasting, but it seems to me that as the tortoise to the hare I have made the same progress as you. Perhaps you would avoid further disaster by driving more slowly; as they say, the more haste, the less speed!"

"It's possible, but I don't drive all that fast. It's more that I don't mind getting up early and starting before breakfast. As I explained to you a couple of days ago, I'm not bound to stop at hotels, I can camp anywhere . . ." Lessing was giving me another drink. Jane had hardly touched hers. "Whoa—thank you. But it's nice to know that, if I did break down, you'd be coming up behind me."

Lessing was looking at something above my left

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shoulder. I half-turned, looking up, and there was the man who ran this place. He spoke to Lessing: "Dinner ready, please."

"All?" Lessing's hand, even whiter in the glare of the pressure lamp behind his head, gestured faintly towards me. "This Bwana's, too?"

I looked up at the serious black face. "*This Bwana's ready long time, too ready!*" Jane laughed. I apologised to the African, and explained to the others, as we moved into the dining-room, that I'd forgotten I'd asked him, nearly two hours ago, to have it ready in an hour. I wished I'd remembered and asked him to delay it, or that he'd been less shy and had come and told me.

It started off as an awkward meal. We all had different things, the contents of tins heated and unheated, tipped into soup-plates which were set around us. We ended up by sharing everything out, sausages, sardines, baked beans, sweetcorn, fruit salad and canned pineapple. Lessing kept filling my glass with whisky and every time he started doing it I grabbed the water jug and did my best to beat him to the brim. When we'd eaten everything, Lessing asked if there was any cheese, which of course there wasn't; there wasn't anything fresh, like cheese or butter or bread. The milk was tinned; it had done well as cream for the fruit. I remembered that among my stores in the Dodge I had a tin of Danish Camembert, so I took the lamp from the veranda and went out and fetched it. It was in better condition than tinned Camembert is usually, and it made us all very happy. I dare say the whisky had helped. Lessing insisted that we should finish the bottle, which, looking at the level of it, wouldn't be hard work. We adjourned to the veranda table and anyone would have thought that we were all the best of friends.

As I was about to sit down it dawned on me that I was now slightly tight, and that after the two or three drinks which Lessing and I would have to drink, to finish the

bottle—Jane wasn't drinking, she'd only had that first one; she'd never much liked whisky—I'd be forgetful. And, you see, I wanted to leave this place before dawn. So I asked them to excuse me for a few minutes. I went into the kitchen and paid the *chef de cuisine* for the tins I'd ordered, and paid for my night's stay—so far as I remember, it came to about seven-and-sixpence—and tipped him. These Rest Houses are run by the local District Commissioner and they couldn't do more than cover costs.

Then I went out to the car and drove it up close to my own room. I got out the four-gallon petrol can and emptied it into the tank. That done, I went into the room, cleaned my teeth and washed, re-packed everything in the suitcase, carried it out to the Dodge and roped it and the empty petrol tin into their places. I was planning to sleep on top of the bed, in my clothes—or bare, if it was too hot dressed—and set off whenever I woke.

I felt rather pleased with myself as I walked back to rejoin the party, but it was smaller; Jane had left. Lessing told me: "My wife asked me to say good night for her, and to make suitable apologies. The long drive was tiring for her. . . ."

I understood his cheerful friendliness. She must have made him believe that she had no interest in me and that, if I had in her, I was pursuing a lost cause. From the fact that I hadn't tried to meet them at Lilongwe and hadn't accepted his offer of their company from this point on along the road, he'd probably deduced that in the short time I and Jane had spent alone that evening in Blantyre she'd made that situation clear to me. She may have let him think that.

I felt sorry for him while I helped to finish his whisky. At one stage—I think it was between the last two drinks—I even suffered a spasm of anger, disliking the duplicity of what Jane and I were doing, wishing I hadn't agreed to what she'd asked me and thinking that, since there had to

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be an explosion and an exposure of the true facts sooner or later—by Jane's insistence later—it would have been better to have it over quickly rather than to prolong the subterfuge. I was not naturally suited to drinking a man's whisky, pretending to be his friend and standing not only his surface friendship but at the same time his supposedly-disguised, pseudo-sympathetic patronage while at the same time I was intending, in certain knowledge of the outcome, to take his wife away from him.

But I must have been successful in hiding what I was feeling and thinking, because we finished the bottle and parted, on the face of it, friends.

It was dark when I awoke and my wrist-watch showed one-thirty. Although the room was cool, it was stuffy, too; perhaps it was the mosquito-net I'd been sleeping under that restricted the flow of air. There was a filthy taste in my mouth, compounded of stale whisky and tobacco fumes, and I wished I hadn't packed my toothbrush. I went into the bathroom and rinsed myself in cold water; then I went out and stood on the step outside the front door of the room, taking in deep breaths of the cool night air.

The sky was clear and full of stars and there was a moon behind the tops of the trees. I was thinking how quiet it was, when suddenly it wasn't any longer; a door had opened and shut, over on the other side, somewhere beyond the central building. It had been shut carefully, as if by someone who didn't want to make a noise, but everything else was so completely silent that the sound had reached me clearly without any doubt as to what it was. It had come, so far as I could tell, from one of the other rooms, separate buildings like this one, about fifty yards away. I stayed where I was on the step, in the shadow from my building, and watched to see who it was that needed to move about at this hour.

I didn't have to wait long. A man, shortish and square-

built, was coming quickly along the path from the farthest of the bungalows. It was Lessing and he was going towards his car. I thought he must have left something in it that he needed, aspirins, perhaps, or mosquito oil; I stayed where I was because I didn't feel in the mood for farewells or any other sort of conversation.

He opened the driving-door of his car, and for a moment I saw him clearly, because the inside light came on while the door was open. He shut it immediately, though, and I couldn't see anything except that Ford standing in the tree-filtered moonlight; if I'd come out now, instead of five minutes ago, I wouldn't have known there was anyone in it. I was puzzled; if he'd just been fetching something, why should he have shut the door, shutting himself in, in the dark? Then I heard the rasp of the starter and the engine hummed; I thought: He's going to drive it over to his room. Either because he and Jane have decided to leave now, as I'm doing, or because he can't sleep and he's getting everything ready so as to get away quickly at breakfast-time.

An odd thing was that he didn't turn on the lights. I saw the car begin to move, and I was expecting it to turn half-right and roll up to that farther building. But instead of that, it made a wide turn and headed slowly away toward the road, still without lights. Now I was really baffled; Lessing was alone, I knew that, because I'd seen right into the car when the door had been open, with the light burning inside. Why on earth was he leaving on his own, leaving Jane here?

I suppose that all the thinking and planning I'd been putting into my embryo novel had quickened my imagination, because I had several wild theories at once: that he'd had a row with Jane and was leaving her stranded; that he'd guessed how things were between her and me and was making a dignified exit, leaving a letter on the dressing-table wishing us luck; that she'd told him, and

he was going out in a fit of alcoholic desperation to kill himself. He wouldn't have to go far: back a couple of miles the way we'd come from yesterday, to the Njakwa Gorge. . . . Far-fetched theories, all of them, but then, his actions were themselves extraordinary.

At the end of the driveway he'd turned right, toward the main road. I ran out to the Dodge, climbed in and drove out a hundred yards behind him. I didn't turn my own lights on, but as I swung out into the road there was enough moonlight for me to see that he was at that moment making another right turn, into the main road. Whatever he was doing, he wasn't going back to Njakwa.

I was lucky in that, since he was driving without lights, he must have needed to concentrate all his attention on the road ahead of him. Even if he could have seen me in his rear mirror, he probably wouldn't have had much chance to look in it. Driving in the dark you don't need to, anyway; the lights of anything coming up behind are obvious at once. I had to concentrate on the road ahead, too, but I had the advantage that I could keep an eye on him at the same time; I knew that if another car had been following me, with no lights on, I wouldn't have seen it. I kept between seventy and a hundred yards behind him for about six miles—that's a rough estimate, it may have been four, or eight—and then suddenly I realised that I was gaining on him; we'd only been doing about twenty-five miles an hour and now he must have slowed to a crawl. I did the same. Then he swung left, apparently into the bush.

I drove on a few yards, then stopped and put my head out and listened. I could still hear the Ford's engine, and it was getting fainter, so I could assume that he hadn't just stopped but was driving up some track or side road. I didn't remember one being marked on the map. I drove on very slowly until I was about forty yards from the place where he'd turned, and there I edged up right

against the trees and stopped, on the left of the road. I got out of the Dodge and pushed the door shut, taking care not to let it slam; then I started walking quietly up the roadside, always in the dark shadow of the bush.

The trees thinned on my left and ahead of me I saw the place where Lessing had turned off the road. It wasn't even a track, just a gap in the bush, and the ground flattish but uneven. I still hadn't the remotest notion of what he could be doing, and I was excited at the prospect of getting closer to him and finding out. I halted just short of the clear ground and looked left, into the bush. I could see only trees and scrub, a vague tangle of branches against the stars. It was absolutely quiet now, and there was no sign of any movement; for all I knew, Lessing might be twenty yards away, or a thousand.

I looked at the track, if it could be called that, and made a guess at the way it ran. Then, turning into the bush, I began to pick my way forward between the trees, keeping more or less parallel with that line. I'd moved in about a dozen yards when the silence was broken so suddenly and strangely that I stopped dead, startled and rather ill at ease. The first thing had been a long, not loud but shrill whistle—a high note that lasted about five seconds and was then abruptly cut off. When it stopped, Lessing's voice called out sharply from somewhere on the right. I didn't hear any words clearly enough to know what he'd called, but there was no doubt at all that the shout had come from him. The next moment I was blinded by brilliant white lights, car lights, that sprang out of the bush ahead of me straight into my eyes and flooded the bush with their harsh, dazzling glare. I dropped to the ground like a shot rabbit and I felt sure those lights must be from Lessing's car and that, if he hadn't seen me and switched them on for that reason, he couldn't have failed to see me before I dropped; but, as I crouched low on the ground with my pulse racing, I realised that it couldn't

have been Lessing who turned them on, unless my ears had played me false. His shout had come from the right, and it was the whistle that had come from the front where those lights still glared.

From the right I heard a car engine cough into life. I could hear the car moving, too, slowly but laboriously over the rough ground. The lights in front of me went out and two smaller ones took their place; the other car, not Lessing's, had switched off its headlights and the ones I saw now were its sidelights. I stayed where I was on the ground; absolutely still, with a sharp, stinging pain in my left knee where a thorn had gashed it as I fell. It felt like a stab from a bayonet.

The lights of Lessing's car showed now, dimmed; they glimmered through the bush, moving slowly left towards the other pair. When they were almost together, the lights themselves vanished—Lessing's, I mean—and I saw only their glow on the bush and knew that he'd swung his car to the right so that it pointed away from where I lay. The sound of the engine died suddenly and at the same moment he switched on the headlights, driving a great cone of brilliance into the clearing where he'd stopped. I say clearing; I mean there were no trees of any size there: those lights shone across low scrub and thorn bushes and lit the edge of the trees where they started again on the other side. They lit, too, the front and side of an enormous van, a pantechicon; they even lit the name that was painted across the front of its cab, AFRICAN ROAD HAULAGE COMPANY. I'd seen a van like this one before, with the same firm's name, and Jane had told me it was the name of a cartage firm which Lessing had started.

Lessing got out of his car; I heard the door slam and then I saw him cross in front of the bonnet; I saw him very clearly as he passed through the headlights, walking towards the van. The driver got down from the van, too,

and went to meet Lessing, and they stood talking on the edge of the glare. Then they both turned, and a third man appeared suddenly in front of them. Where he'd come from I'd no idea; he simply appeared there and for all I knew he might have dropped out of a tree. He wore tattered, dirty-looking clothes, and he was carrying something that looked remarkably like a rifle.

The conclusion to which I'd come, at this point, was that Lessing was using his cartage firm as a cover to some sort of smuggling. It had to be smuggling on a very large scale, or he wouldn't have needed furniture vans to carry whatever it was; but I didn't quite see the point of the man with the gun. I wanted to get a closer look at him and to hear what they were talking about, so I began to worm my way forward, straight toward that group at the edge of the lights; this was the only possible direction of approach, because from any other the Ford's headlights would be in my eyes. I wondered what purpose Lessing could have in leaving them burning; well, no doubt I'd find that out before long. There was another question in my mind, a bigger one, more persistent and, to me, far more important: whether Jane knew about this. Whether this had been her reason for wanting me out of the way. If it was, all she'd said to me could have been lies and evasions—all of it—and *Lessing in full knowledge of the deception.*

I used to be good at moving in thick bush, in Burma—thicker than this, and they call it jungle, there—a long time ago, well out of mind and practice. I'd covered only half the distance and Lessing was alone with the armed man now; the driver had walked round to the back of his van and was out of sight. Someone was coming out of the trees on the far side of the clearing into the bright paths of the headlights. I settled down, lying on my stomach with my weight on my elbows, and watched.

The man who stepped out into the glare was an African.

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He was a big man, and he carried a whip, a stout, man-killing whip of the sort known down South as a *sjambok*. He stopped, clear of the bush, looking towards the men by the car and raising his left hand to shield his eyes from the dazzle. He gestured at them with the whip, a sort of sloppy salute. The man with the rifle shouted something, and swung his free arm, indicating the van. Lessing, at this time, was lighting what I took to be a cigarette, but when the smoke of it drifted back to me I realised that it was a cheroot.

The tall African turned away from them, facing back the way he had come, and called out a command in what sounded like Swahili. Then he came on into the centre of the brightly-lit clearing, swinging his whip like a swagger-cane and watching the two by the car.

In telling this, I feel the same sick horror that I felt at the time I saw it. I lay there with my face eighteen inches from the dust and I watched a line of manacled slaves come stumbling out of the bush and into the flood of light; the light hurt them and they tried to raise their hands to protect their eyes, but there were chains on their wrists as well as round their waists, small chains shackled to the long, heavy one which ran from front to rear between the double file of women. They were all women, young girls; they were spaced alternately on either side of the chain so that no two of them walked side by side. Many of them were so plainly exhausted that they seemed to be dragged by the chain rather than moved by their own legs and feet. I could hear their panting breath and see how the sweat on their bodies glistened and ran in the harsh light. Some had scraps of cloth around their waists, but most were completely naked. Their hands plucked feebly at the chains, as if they were trying to ease the weight of it from their bodies.

There were two other guards, besides the one who'd come out ahead, and they all carried whips. When the

first one rose and fell, slashing down on to bare flesh that sagged helpless in its chains, a whimper of fear and pain ran down the whole length of the line; it came from all the women, not just the one who had been lashed—*she* looked unconscious. Lessing was still there, holding the cheroot to his lips, the smoke wreathing up into the beam of light. Those whimpers had made the guards angry, and two more whips fell savagely: my own body seemed to jerk, and I had to turn my head away quickly.

There was a minute while the earth swung and rocked; then it steadied, and I made myself look up again. Only the last of the slaves were in sight, the last pair, one on each side of the chain; the others were already in the van, driven, I suppose, up some sort of ramp; I couldn't see the back of the van from where I lay. Lessing still stood there, watching without movement, and at that moment the man at his side walked forward into the full glare of the head-lamps. Pointing at the van with the barrel of his rifle, he turned to say something to Lessing, and I saw that he was a half-caste, part-African, part-Arab, perhaps part-white.

I neither needed nor wanted to see any more. I squirmed round and wriggled away, taking enormous care not to move a stick or a leaf, barely bruising the dust. Now and then I'd stop and listen, and then, hearing nothing, look back slowly over my shoulder before I went on again. I stayed on my belly until I'd come to the side of the road; then I stood up, sick and shaking, and paused for a minute to listen before I set off back to where I'd left the Dodge. I wasn't only shocked, I was frightened half to death; I was sweating and trembling and in a strange and terrifying way I seemed to feel the weight and rasp of chains on my own body.

I think I got out my water-bottle and drank most of its contents; I know I'd been terribly thirsty and that then I felt better. I remember splashing some of the water on my face, pulling sticks and leaves out of my shirt, and

feeling my knee stinging as if it was poisoned. I remember that my mind felt numb, that I had no plan in what I was doing or going to do. I should, I know, have been thinking of only one thing: of getting myself back to Rumpi, to the D.C. or the police. That should have been an instinctive and natural reaction.

But I sat behind the wheel of my car and the only thing in my mind was whether Jane knew about this. Whether she, Jane, could be a party to the unspeakable horror I'd witnessed during the last thirty minutes. Whether she, who in my mind was the pulse of my own life, whom I'd loved from the moment of our first meeting so that now the word *Jane* was the loveliest sound in the English language, visually clear, intensely *pure*—I'm not trying to use the word in its conventional sense, although I believe there is purity in sin as well as in virtue—and astonishingly gentle . . . whether she, Jane, could have even an inkling of what her husband was doing and bear in that knowledge to breathe the same air as he breathed, let alone share his bed. . . .

And, most horrible of all, whether that could have been her reason for begging me to leave her and that creature alone while they did it, and whether, if that were the truth of it, then the rest, the wildly impossible, splendid dream of her coming to me afterwards was a lie as well. . . .

I'd no plan, only horror of what seemed likely to be the truth; my desire for it to be not the truth was so strong that I'd have leapt at the chance to accept a lie rather than be told the other thing for fact.

I'd started the car and was driving north, the way it had been pointing; as I would have been, happily, two hours ago, if I'd only set off five minutes earlier instead of coming out of my room when I had, if I'd gone straight out to the car instead of pausing on the step.

I remember wondering why I was driving northward,

instead of towards Jane, where the truth lay. I don't, even now, know whether I was driving away from her because I didn't want to hear what she'd tell me, or whether I wanted to get away, alone, for a chance to control my mind and my fear before I saw her.

I was changing from first into second when the yellow Ford came fast out of the bush on to the road a few yards ahead of me; it had no lights on and it was half on to the road before I saw it. I stamped on the clutch and the brake and dragged the wheel over so that the Dodge skidded on the loose earth surface of the road and slewed round broadside-on to the Ford, still skidding. I took my foot off the brake and reversed the wheel and the car spun back and for a moment I thought I was going to get past the Ford, which had stopped dead, slanted over half the road . . . but I was skidding the other way now, and the Dodge ended up with itself and the Ford in a V across the road with their front bumpers locked together.

TED'S STORY-IX

A FACE I HATED stared in at me through the left front window. I leant over and wound down the window and Lessing asked me: "Are you all right, Carpenter?"

It was a difficult question to answer. I could have said: "No, I'm not. I'm worried that your wife may be playing me false by not deceiving you as she's supposed to be doing; it matters very much indeed because I am in love with her and the only aim I have in life is to take her away from you." Another way of answering would have been to slide across the seat until I was close enough to reach through the window and take him by the throat and squeeze the life out of him. For that matter, I could have synchronised the speech and the action.

In fact, I shook my head, to get the buzzing out of my ears, and told him: "So far as I know. Why aren't your lights on?"

He smiled at me. "I could ask you that same question."

I looked quickly out through the windscreen and saw that he was right. They *weren't* on. I thought: They must have been broken, or fused, when we hit. We hadn't really hit at all, only the front bumpers, but lights are delicate things. I groped for the knob on the dashboard and pulled it; it came out two notches, first the side lights and then the heads. So this sudden meeting had been as much my fault as his. It didn't surprise me; I was dazed and I still hadn't much idea what I'd been doing or what I was going to do.

"I thought they were on. Sorry. But . . ."

"I owe you an explanation. It must seem very peculiar, my driving out like that, out of . . ."—he waved a hand backwards at the gap in the bush—"out of *that*, as I did. . . . Look, come along back to the Rest House and I'll explain. We'll have some coffee and I will tell you all about it."

"I was hoping to make an early start. I'm behind time . . ."

"You would be doing me a favour if you came back with me, Carpenter. I would like to explain. Surely half an hour can make very little difference to you?" He smiled, an easy, charming smile. His self-possession amazed me. Of course, he'd no idea I'd been with him in the bush; but still, to be so calm, so unmoved! Some of the forced charm faded suddenly; the eyes were hard. "Why do you stare at me like that, Carpenter?"

I pulled myself together. I *had* been staring at him—no doubt, in tune with my thoughts—with a mixture of interest and loathing, the way one might look at a venomous snake through the glass of its box in a menagerie.

"I'm sorry. I haven't really woken up properly, I'm afraid. I got straight off the bed and into the car. And this . . ."—I nodded towards the locked fronts of our two cars—"I feel a bit dazed."

His face relaxed again. "All the more reason for you to follow my suggestion. If you were to go on like this . . . we are fortunate, you know, that neither car is seriously damaged."

I nodded. "I'm sorry I forgot my lights, but I really wasn't expecting anyone to come charging out of the bush at me."

He jerked his head impatiently. "I will explain it to you over that coffee. You are coming?"

Well, why not? If I left now, on my own, I'd only be an hour ahead of them at most. Might as well give in to this—this whatever-it-was—that seemed determined to

keep me close to Jane. The closer I was to her, the sooner I'd have the answer which I had to have before I could think of anything else.

"All right."

"Good! Now, if you will go forward six inches, I can then go in reverse until we are separated." I edged the car ahead, and he went forward and leant across the bonnet of the Ford, watching the bumpers. He called, sharply: "Stop!" Then he climbed through the narrow space over the bumpers and got into his car. Pulling the wheel over to the left, he backed slowly away; there was a sound of scraping metal and then a loud clang, and that was that. He backed right off the road, into the place he'd come out of, and I drove on past so that he could come out again, to the right. When he'd gone, I turned in the same way and followed him to the Rest House. It was still dark, but there was a faint radiance over the bush ahead and to the left, and I knew that within an hour the night would be over.

I drove close up to my own room; the key was still in the lock. I wanted to clean myself up before Lessing saw me in the light. I carried in my suitcase, had a quick bath, and poured disinfectant over the graze in my knee; it looked red and angry and hurt quite badly. I dressed in the clothes I'd been driving in yesterday and packed those I'd been wearing. It was lucky I had the opportunity to change them, because they were smothered in earth and the trousers were torn; if Lessing had seen me in them I'd have had difficulty in explaining the state of them.

As I put the case back in my car and walked over to the dining-room building, I was wondering what sort of explanation he would have for his own activities. There was a light shining out of the veranda window, so I guessed that he'd be waiting there for me. He was, and the attendant had already made coffee. Lessing flapped his hands at me, beckoning impatiently with both of them

at once. I sat down, and he began to pour the coffee.

"You've been a long time. I was worried that my wife would be here before you came."

"Worried? I'm a bit dull this morning, I know, but . . ."

"Here's your coffee." He pushed the sugar across beside the cup. "Now listen, Carpenter. I must ask you, most earnestly, not to mention our . . . that is, the manner, and the place, of our meeting. I have simply told her that you were on the point of leaving and that I persuaded you to wait and breakfast with us. She has no idea that I was . . . out . . . this morning. Will you do this for me?" Before I could answer he went on, quickly: "I should be more than grateful. Any way that I could return such a . . ."

I stopped him. "Wait. I've absolutely no wish to discuss your movements with your wife, now or any other time, and I certainly don't want any 'return' for not doing that. But would you like to tell me what you were doing out there?"

He leant over the table and grasped my left arm and squeezed it. "Thank you, Carpenter. I shan't forget it." I leant back quickly, and he had to let go or fall across the table; just looking at him made my flesh crawl, let alone having to endure any sort of physical contact.

But I was happy, very happy! At first I had wondered if he might have been putting this secrecy business on as an act, aimed at making me think that Jane didn't know of his activities. But since he didn't know that I knew about those activities, there'd have been no point in his doing that. It added up to the fact that Jane didn't know. There'd been no lies. I had the answer to that terrifying question and it was the one I wanted, the only one I could live with.

I even managed to smile at Lessing. "Well?"

He fidgeted, as if the explanation embarrassed him. I drank my coffee slowly, watching him over the brim of the cup, and I had to admit that, when he *did* act, he did it well. He said, awkwardly: "I couldn't sleep last night. In fact,

I was wide awake after a short doze. You know, perhaps, how one is restless? I . . . I *never* sleep well. After an hour, two perhaps, I am awake and I do not close my eyes again."

"So you went out, naturally, and drove your car into the bush?"

He didn't see anything funny in it. "Yes, Mr Carpenter; on a journey like this, we drive thousands of miles through a land in which there is much wild life. Yet how often do we see any of it? A buck here, a zebra there, perhaps a giraffe, a wild pig? That is all, and frequently not even that. And the reason? Simply that we are about during the day and the animals are about at night. So, sometimes, when I am sleepless and in a place of this sort, a remote place with little human settlement, I go out into the bush, into the real Africa, and sit quietly, and watch. You see?"

He'd done it well. A stranger would have been taken in. I nodded, slowly. "See much?"

For a moment, while we stared at each other, he didn't say anything. I couldn't tell whether he was wondering what to invent as an answer, or whether he was reading the contempt and dislike in my face and perhaps seeking a reason for it. But as I stared back at him, his expression changed; the eyelids drooped, and the thick, soft lips curved in a smile that was as sensual as it was repulsive. He murmured, quietly, as if he was reminding himself rather than answering my question: "Oh, yes. The bush—it *lives*, at night!" He was breathing fast and his lips, half-opened in that disgusting smirk, were damp; at any moment there'd be dribble on his chin.

And I understood Lessing . . . now. Far from revolting him, as it would any normal human being, what he'd seen during the night had given him intense pleasure. While he'd been standing there against the bonnet of his car, when I couldn't see his face because he had his back to me,

he'd been revelling in the sight and sounds of it. He was a pervert of a peculiarly filthy kind . . . *and Jane was married to him.*

I was so preoccupied with the realisation of it, and he so lost in mental contemplation of his night's enjoyment, that neither of us heard her come into the veranda. She was beside my chair before I knew of her arrival; I stood up, quickly, apologising; only then did Lessing come out of his trance. He stood up, looking embarrassed, like a nasty little boy caught in some shameful act. Jane looked at him for a moment without speaking, staring at him as if this peculiar condition of his was something she'd seen before and then, as well as now, failed to understand. She was pale and, when she turned to me, I saw that small frown of worry between her eyes.

"I hear you've decided to come with us, after all?" It was a question, more than a statement. And here I couldn't answer it. I told her: "I had the strongest intentions, Jane, but your husband confounded them with his talk of breakfast."

Lessing had taken a handkerchief out of his pocket and was patting his face with it. He smiled at her and murmured: "I take the full responsibility, my dear." She didn't even glance at him.

Jane's breakfast was dry toast and coffee. (I'd only once seen her eat a proper breakfast, and that was at the High Noon Hotel, in the Cape. I'd remembered it ever since as one of the most wonderful meals I'd ever shared.) Lessing had bought some eggs yesterday from an African on the roadside in one of the villages we'd passed through; he ate three, with tinned bacon, but I could only manage one, and that was a struggle. Normally I have an excellent appetite and Jane, who knew it, seemed puzzled. She kept looking at me and her eyes were full of questions. None of us spoke much and the meal was soon over. They went to their room to finish packing and Lessing was first out; he

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came over to the dining-room to pay his bill, while I was sitting on the veranda, enjoying a pipe. He didn't know I was there until I spoke to him.

"Oh, Lessing . . ."

He stopped, half-way to the door of the dining-room, and looked round quickly. I told him: "I've one more question to ask you."

He came over to me as if he didn't much want to. "Don't you think we should be starting?" He pointed at the sun, which was already climbing out of the trees.

"Certainly. But tell me: why is it so important that your wife should remain ignorant of your interest in wild animals?"

"Oh . . ."—he leant with his hands on the back of a chair, facing me—"of course, I should have told you that. We were interrupted . . ."

"You went into a trance."

He winced and his face stiffened. Then he squeezed out that synthetic smile again. "I hardly know what you mean by that remark, Carpenter. The reason for which I would prefer that you should not tell my wife of what I was doing while she slept is that I have done the same thing on a previous occasion and for some cause which I cannot pretend to understand, some . . ."—he shrugged—"womanish quirk, she was . . . disturbed . . . when I told her of it."

I nodded and stood up, knocking out my pipe. "Thank you. No more questions." He stood there as I went out to the car to wait for them to be ready, still leaning on the chair as I passed him and went out.

Ten minutes later I was driving just clear of the yellow Ford's red dust; I'd have led him, but the dust is unpleasant, and I was thinking of Jane.

After half an hour's driving we came to a P.W.D. depot and stopped to buy enough petrol to fill both tanks. It was

expensive petrol, but I filled the empty can, too. The next hundred miles were about as dull as they could be and, by the time we got to the Nyasaland Customs post at Fort Hill, I was thoroughly sick of having the Ford in front of me. I'd taken to driving about half a mile behind it, but it was annoying to have to adjust my speed to suit Lessing's.

Just short of one o'clock we reached Tunduma and stopped again for petrol. Tunduma is more than a road junction, it's also a place where three territories meet: Nyasaland was behind us, Northern Rhodesia on our left, and we were now heading into Tanganyika. While the petrol gushed, we all got out of the cars to stretch our legs, and that sort of thing, and Jane told me that they'd had ham sandwiches made in Rumpi and that there was enough of them for all of us. She told me that they planned to stop for lunch after we'd been through the Tanganyika Customs, which Lessing, from the map he had, had understood to be about two miles away. The idea of lunch appealed to me; I hadn't thought about food and, if I'd been on my own, I'd probably have gone right through to Mbeya and had meat for tea. But I was hungry, now that the subject had been raised, and ham is one of my favourite foods. I told them that the Customs post was a lot farther than they thought, and that lunch wouldn't be until the early afternoon. I was on ground that I knew, now; I'd come up from Mpika, in Northern Rhodesia, twice before. We debated whether to have our lunch this side of the Customs barrier, but decided—Jane's decision—that we'd enjoy the halt more if we had that tedious formality behind us. There were only about seventy miles to Mbeya, which was to be the night's stop, so there wasn't any hurry.

The Tanganyika Customs start with a striped boom across the road; then a uniformed African who regards himself as a highly important official appears and directs the parking of each car with loud, imperious commands and

much waving of the hands. After this flourish of officialdom, the Customs House itself is rather a come-down. It is a very small hut, and the Asian Customs Officer does not wear uniform. I've often thought they ought to give him one, because his own clothes—anyway, those he's worn whenever I've met him—should have been burnt long ago. It may be that they have a new man now, as smartly dressed as the askari or whatever he is outside; if this is the case, I apologise. In any case, the one who was on duty on this occasion, and has been whenever I've passed through, was more strict in the performance of his duties than most of the Customs people at such borders. He invariably wanted to see inside the boot of each car, and usually he liked to probe the interior of a suitcase, chosen at random. He went through this routine now, with the Lessings and with me, after he'd checked and stamped our papers. Lessing made a fuss, telling the fellow that it wasn't necessary; consequently he had to open three cases instead of one.

Personally I had no objections; the man could look into anything he liked. I'd already done my own looking and seen what I'd wanted to see—what I'd been thinking of for some hours. It was there in his register, that the first vehicle which had passed through the Customs post after it opened early in the morning had been one owned and operated by the African Road Haulage Company, carrying 'miscellaneous goods'. I would have liked to tell the officer just how miscellaneous those goods had been! On the way, I'd come to several conclusions and one of them was that the van probably had a double front, a forward compartment which wouldn't easily be detected unless some very meticulous inspector took inside and outside measurements. Another was that Lessing had most likely detained me as he had, so that his van would have a clear run through on its own. Now that it *was* through, it could off-load its cargo to finish the journey on foot, or tranship

it to some other form of transport; even if they were stopped now, there'd be no evidence as to how they crossed the border.

I wished I'd been less stupid, and gone to the D.C. at Rumpi. The odds were that he wouldn't have believed my story, but he would surely have agreed to telephone the police at this border or in Mbeya so that the van would have been met and properly searched. If I hadn't been so preoccupied with Jane's part in the affair, I might have thought of that. Now my only hope was to catch Lessing in some other place where he might re-establish contact with the van or its contents; I knew beyond doubt that to tell some policeman and not have evidence to show him would be a waste of time. The story was too far-fetched to stand on its own without support. Besides, I didn't just want to stop the van; I wanted to have Lessing on the spot and properly involved when it happened. I thought there must still be a death penalty for slave-running, and I wanted that for Lessing.

He was looking back at me, his head stuck out of the driving window of the Ford. "Are you ready, Carpenter?" I nodded and climbed into my car; the askari raised the boom for us and we were on the way again; I took it slowly until I was clear of his dust. There was no breath of wind and the dust hung like a cloud above the road and took a long time to settle.

When we stopped for lunch, we drove right off the road, to the left; the ground was flat for miles in every direction, dotted with flat-topped thorn trees. The earth was quite bare, so I gathered sticks and made a fire and brewed coffee, as my contribution to the meal; it boiled while we ate the sandwiches. Afterwards I took a photograph for Townsend; I got Lessing to drive his car into a suitable position and then persuaded Jane to stand beside it. The colours were good—the yellow of the car, Jane's blue jean trousers and her dark-blue checked shirt, her

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streaky hair. . . . I had just her and the bonnet of the car in the foreground, and that vast, flat landscape stretching away beyond. . . .

All we had to do now was drive for another hour or so, and we'd be in Mbeya. I put the coffee things away, stamped out the fire, scooped earth on top of the embers and trod it down, and we moved off. As there was so much time in hand and we'd be in Mbeya well before dark, I stayed back until Lessing was about a mile away before I accelerated to a normal speed.

Ten minutes later I came over a rise and saw the yellow car stopped, only a hundred yards ahead. Lessing was standing close to it, in the middle of the road, and as soon as I came in sight he began to wave his arms at me. I thought: He's had a puncture. I slowed, and stopped a dozen yards behind the Ford, and he came hurrying up to meet me. He looked worried. I asked that usual, always silly question: "Trouble?"

He was excited, jerking his hands about as he wasted words. "I don't know what it is, Carpenter, I know very little about cars, you see, but I think some important part must have broken. Do you understand these things? Look . . ."—he was leading me to the Ford—"I'll open the bonnet, you can see . . ."

He had difficulty even in doing that, he couldn't find the catch to release it. Then Jane took the lock off from inside and it flew back. I glanced inside; everything seemed to be in its right place. I'm no mechanic.

"Tell me what happened."

"A terrible noise, first . . ."

"Where from?"

"From the back. Somewhere at the back. At least, I think so. A grating noise, very loud, and I stopped at once, of course, and now it won't move at all, not at all."

I closed the bonnet. From what he'd said it was pretty

obvious that his differential had gone. I climbed into the driving seat beside Jane and tried the gears. They seemed to work normally. I started the engine, put the car into first, and let the clutch out gently; there was a jerk from the back end of the transmission and the engine stopped. It did the same thing in reverse. I left the gears in neutral, with the brake off, and got out. Lessing asked me: "Well? What do you make of it?" Sweat was running down his face.

I asked him to come round to the back with me and push, to see if the car would move. It wouldn't. I straightened up. "Your differential's gone. You'll have to be towed into Mbeya."

He nodded at me. "I am more than glad that you were with us, Carpenter. You have a rope?"

"I've a chain, but I can't tow you. You see, your back wheels won't turn. I'll have to go on into Mbeya and get a breakdown van to come out. They'll lift your back-end off the road on a winch and tow you stern-first. I'm afraid there's nothing else for it. Would you and Jane like to come with me, and leave the car here?"

Lessing shook his head. "No. I wouldn't like to leave it. But . . . it is no great distance, you would not be long . . ."

I shrugged. "I agree it's best not to leave it. But it'll take me the best part of an hour to get into the town, and even if they can send out at once that'll make another hour before they get here. So you'll sit here for at least two hours."

He said, gloomily, as if it was my fault: "I suppose it can't be helped. . . . You had better take my wife in with you."

I tried not to look too delighted about it. Jane slid out of the car and stood beside us. She said to her husband: "Will you get my case out, then? You've got room, Ted?" I nodded; I was so damned excited and trying so

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hard not to show that I was probably scowling. Jane smiled and told Lessing: "Then I can take both cases, darling."

I took them from him and carried them over to my car. They were matching cases, one an ordinary expanding suitcase and the other one of those wedge-shaped hanging things; I put them into the back of the Dodge beside my own. Then I went back to say farewell to Lessing. I told him: "If you need comfort, remember I was stuck for more than half a day yesterday." The thought didn't seem to cheer him, and I resisted a strong temptation to add that, if he kept very still and quiet and did his best to merge himself into the landscape, he might even see some wild life.

The garage was on our way to the hotel. I left Jane in the car and an attendant filling its tank, while I went inside and found the manager. I told him what had happened and where Lessing was and that it was a yellow car so he couldn't miss it; this amused him because, even if it was a horse and cart in a hundred miles of empty road, it wouldn't be hard to find. He told me that his breakdown truck was out at the moment, attending some other accident in the opposite direction; he'd send it as soon as it came in, which shouldn't be very long, not more than an hour and possibly less.

I paid for the petrol and we drove on up the short hill and turned right and stopped outside the hotel. Jane had been very quiet all the way, as if she had something on her mind; between the garage and the hotel, after I'd told her about the truck being out on another job, I don't think we exchanged a word. All the way she'd sat as far away from me as she could get, against the other door.

I pulled up outside the front of the hotel and left her in the car while I went in to see about bookings. The manager was behind the desk.

"My name's Carpenter. You have a Mr and Mrs Lessing booked here for tonight."

He studied his list. "Carpenter? I don't . . ."

"No. Mr and Mrs Lessing."

He stared at me for a moment, then went back to the list. "Lessing. Yes, that's right. But I thought you said . . ."

"Mr Lessing's car's about fifty miles south, with a broken differential. I've brought his wife on, and he'll be along in two or three hours; the garage are sending a pick-up to tow him in."

The man smiled. "I see. Thank you, Mr Carpenter. Perhaps Mrs Lessing would come in and sign the register? She's in twenty-eight."

"I'll ask her. But look . . . I've no booking, and I need a room for myself. For one night. Can you manage that?"

"Oh, dear. We're very full, Mr . . . er . . . Carpenter. Very full. We always are, you know." He was over on the other side of the office now, studying an enormous sheet of paper which was covered in numbers and ruled lines and names in block letters. "You're in luck."

"Thank God for that!"

"A cancellation. Twenty-eight A is available. Our rooms are outside, you know, two in each bungalow, two doubles. You can have this double at a reduced rate if you're prepared to share; I mean, if someone else should arrive late without an advance booking. Otherwise I'm afraid it would be the full rate!"

"If someone else does arrive, tell him there's no room, and I'll pay the full rate."

The manager chuckled. "I'm sorry, but I'm bound by the rules; you have to take the room one way or the other."

"Then I'll have it for myself."

He filled in a space on the page. "Your initial, Mr Carpenter?"

"E.J. I'll ask Mrs Lessing to come in and sign." I went out and fetched her, and we filled in the details in the register, she writing 'Mr and Mrs Lessing' against her room and signing for them both. When I'd done mine, I asked the man if he'd have some tea sent to our rooms, and he said yes, he could, it would give him pleasure to do it; he didn't look at me while he said it, only at Jane. He hadn't taken his eyes off her since she walked in, and I didn't blame him for that. He pulled himself together, though, and began to explain to me how I should drive the car round to the other entrance, the higher one, and drive it up to bungalow number twenty-eight, but I already knew this because I'd been here before. I knew his face, too, although he didn't know mine. He banged his hand down on the bell on the counter and an African porter ambled up out of nowhere and took the two keys from him. I told Jane that I'd bring her luggage round and, while she followed the boy on a short-cut through the hotel, I went out to the car and turned it and drove in through the uphill entrance to the parking space behind the bungalows.

The boy who'd shown Jane through the hotel was waiting at the back of one of the little buildings, so I stopped there and got the cases out. I gave him Jane's first and, when he came back for mine, I'd already locked the car up for its night's rest. The boy was taking my luggage into Jane's room, but I stopped him on the threshold. While he put the two cases into my half of the bungalow, I tapped on Jane's door and she called: "Come in." I pushed the door open and saw that she'd hung that dress-case, or whatever you call it, on the open wardrobe door, and she had her back to me as she stood there letting the dresses down on their hangers.

"Shall we have tea together?"

"Let's."

"In here, or mine?"

She looked at me over her shoulder. "Yours, please. I'm starting to make a mess in here."

I tipped the boy and told him to bring both teas to my room. Then I went in, hung up my suits, unpacked the other things I needed, and went into the bathroom for a wash. There was a bath to each room. When I came out, there was a tray with tea for two, and two pieces of sponge cake, on the only table. I went to Jane's door and called: "Tea's ready."

"I'll be with you in a moment, Ted."

I fiddled around and, when she came in, I said: "It seemed odd to be talking to you through a closed door."

"Yes." She glanced round at my door, which she'd left open; she turned back and shut it, and I moved the table closer to the armchair so that she could sit in it while she poured the tea. She came away from the door, and glanced at the tray as she sat down. "What horrid-looking cake!" She moved the cups around and poured the tea. "Do you still have one and a half sugars?"

"Yes . . . Jane?"

She looked up. "'M?"

"I love you."

"I know. I love you, too . . . this tea's cold." She put her cup down in its saucer, making a face at it as if it was medicine with a bad taste. I drank mine quickly, because I had a thirst. Then I pulled the table out of the way, bent and took hold of her shoulders and kissed her. She turned her face away. "No, Ted. Please . . ." I'd only kissed her cheek, beside her right ear. I took her chin in my hand and turned her face to me and kissed her mouth. She wriggled back in the chair, pushing me away. "Ted, for heaven's sake! The window . . . if anyone was passing!"

"Oh . . ." I went across and pulled the curtain over it. While I was doing this, she jumped up out of the chair and was going to the door, but I caught her before she reached

it and turned her round gently and held her. She still tried not to kiss me but I could feel her weakening against me and I kissed her neck and her ear until her face turned to me and then I kissed her mouth and again it only needed patience . . . her lips opened and her arms were round my neck, warm and smooth and soft and sweet like her lips, like all of her. She pulled her head back but her fingers still dug into my back.

"Ted, darling, we mustn't. It's dangerous. If Felix . . ."

I loosened her arms and stepped back, holding her in front of me. "He couldn't possibly be here for two hours. We can't *not*." I went over to the door and turned the key in the lock.

Jane watched me doing it, then she asked: "What if they come for the tea things?" I'd forgotten that; I unlocked the door and put the tray down outside, on top of the steps. Then I came in and locked the door again. She moved quickly into my arms with her lips open and I felt her tongue in my mouth. I slid my hands up between us and undid the buttons down the front of her blouse and pushed it back over her shoulders. She dropped her arms so that I could push it off, and I unhooked the catch on her brassière, between her shoulder-blades. She stood quite still then, watching my eyes while I looked at her; her breasts were startlingly white against the glowing tan of her arms and throat. I told her in a voice I hardly knew to be my own: "You still don't need to wear those things." Her hands came up slowly and she pulled my head down to kiss what my eyes had been loving and I heard her answer: "I show far too much when I don't," as if it was a voice from a thousand miles away. Certainly it was three years since I'd heard it, that tone that was half a murmur and half a whisper and yet neither, more a kind of music, gay and sad at the same time yet piercing-sweet, blinding-sweet like the music Pan made down in the reeds by the river, the difference being that his was a

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background to destruction while ours, the kind we made in that dimly sunlit, cotton-shaded room, might, for all I knew, accompany creation.

Afterwards, while Jane lay with her head on my chest and she'd stopped crying, I thought of that again, and hoped for it, hoped strongly; and, after hoping, tried to make it sure.

TED'S STORY-X

IT WAS MID-MORNING and I was driving over the high escarpment of the Baroto Mountains, east of Mbeya. It was a hell of a road, narrow, twisting, pot-holed and corrugated. The surface of it was earth, loose stone and rock; at several points there were hairpin bends with a sheer drop of hundreds of feet on the outside of the curve, and at most of these places the road's surface sloped the wrong way. A very dangerous stretch of road, but I loved every foot of it, every starting skid, every smack of rock against the Dodge's sump . . . loved it, and took it very carefully, for the double reason that now I had a purpose in life and a reason to live—an image before my eyes and a voice in my ear, all of it promise and all of it real. There weren't any doubts now; there were no fears. In the hotel bar last evening—we met there, after we'd bathed and dressed in our separate rooms, separate, but close enough for each to hear the other's splashing on the other side of the wall that divided the bathrooms—while we sipped brandy and dry ginger-ale, I'd told Jane of those fears I'd had all along the way, of things going amiss, of the dream of possessing her wholly and permanently seeming too good to have a chance of coming true; and she had told me I'd been silly to listen to those whispers, that for her part she'd never doubted the outcome right from that night at the 'Auberge Bleu' in Salisbury. It was on the pavement outside, when we'd been saying good night to each other, that she'd first been sure of how things were going to be.

I told her of the quotation that had kept coming into my mind; I mean, that thing: 'The coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave man dies but one.' She said: "It was a silly remark, that, Ted. It's confusing imagination with cowardice. You can realise things and still face up to them."

"Who wrote it? I've been trying to . . ."

"Shakespeare. Not in your words, though. It's in Julius Cæsar, and I think the last bit's 'The valiant taste of death but once'. I love you, Ted."

"I love you, too. It isn't going to be easy, the next few weeks."

"It's going to be horrid. But not for long, darling. In such a little, little while we'll be together."

"And no Lessing."

"No . . . Lessing." She closed her eyes and her hand tightened in mine. "You've no idea what a beautiful thought that is."

"I think I have. Let's have another drink, shall we?" I called for two more, and asked her: "Do you know which hotel in Dar-es-Salaam he's booked at?"

She opened her handbag and looked it up in her diary. "Pan Africa Hotel. Do you know it?"

I did, very well. I told her that I'd try to book myself in there, but that if they didn't have a room for me I'd stay somewhere else and hang around the Pan Africa in the hope that I'd see her before I pushed on northwards to Tanga and Mombasa. I couldn't spare more than a couple of days in Dar. How long the repairs to Lessing's car would take depended entirely on whether there were spares for it in Mbeya. If there were, it would be one day's work at the outside; but if there weren't, and the garage had to send to Nairobi or even to Johannesburg for the parts, well, Jane and her husband might be stuck here for a week or more.

(I was over the top, now, dropping down towards

Chimala and the narrow head-waters of the Great Ruaha River; the bridges over the streams that gave it birth were in very poor condition and one of them had a notice beside it which read CAUTION—BRIDGE DAMAGED. I was still driving eastwards; the road runs that way for a hundred and twenty-five miles before it swings to point north-eastward towards Iringa.)

Lessing had arrived before we finished our second 'horse's necks'. I'd left a message for him at the desk that he could find us in here and he suddenly appeared in the doorway; his face was pink from the sun and he looked hot and irritable. He stared at Jane and then at me as if he hoped to read something in our faces, and perhaps he could; I was so much aware of Jane, so much in love with her—love and the physical want of her sparked and multiplied a hundred times by our love-making—that I was sure it must show in my face. It did in hers; her eyes were bright and there was a glow about her, a warm tranquillity that made her more beautiful than ever.

People in the bar turned to look at us as Lessing, dusty and obviously strained, stood close in front of us, staring down without a smile on his sweat-damp face. He said: "You seem to be enjoying yourselves."

Jane smiled. "We are, Felix. Have you had a dreadful time?" He didn't answer her; he was studying me now. I pointed at a chair.

"Why don't you sit down? Have a long, cold drink? You look as if you need it. Eh?"

He sat down. "I think, beer . . ." I called the waiter. Lessing changed his mind. "No, Carpenter. A John Collins, please, with a great deal of ice." The waiter heard, and went for it. Lessing began to air his woes. "I was three hours sitting in that place, before they came. The mechanic told me that he had been busy elsewhere, but I think he had simply taken his time."

"The van *was* out, on another job, when we got here.

They said they'd send it out to you as soon as it came in. Tell me, have they got spares here?"

"Fortunately, yes. But it will take all day." Lessing shot a glance at his wife. "I have told them that we will be here for tonight and tomorrow night." His drink came, by the time I'd paid for it, he'd half-emptied the glass. All he said was: "It is really too bad."

"You'll feel much better when you've had a bath. And you're lucky, really. You're in a good hotel, and you could have got stuck somewhere much worse. And the garage might not have had spares. Besides, what's one day?"

He glowered at me over his glass. Anyone would have thought that I'd caused his breakdown! "My business commitments on this journey demand a certain punctuality. This delay will be a considerable inconvenience." I thought: Interesting! He put his glass down, empty, and told Jane: "Please have dinner when you like; I may be a long time." He nodded at me, rather rudely, and walked out. Jane murmured: "Poor Felix!"

"Poor Felix be damned!" I was hating the thought of having to leave her with him; I told her so now. She shrugged. "Don't worry. I've stood him for . . ."—she paused: then went on, "all this time. Another few weeks . . ."—she flipped the fingers of one hand, dismissing all thought of that interval—"Do you know, Ted, I'm feeling like you said you did, that it's so wonderful, so absolutely perfect that it can't come true."

I took her hand—to hell with those curious eyes above the bar stools! People will say . . . *let* them say! Then I thought: No, it isn't fair to Jane; she has to stay here tomorrow with him. I let go of her hand and at the same moment I caught the waiter's eye and pointed at our two glasses. **He grinned and went to the end of the bar.**

"One of the things that baffles me about your husband is that he's such a fool, so clumsy and obvious . . . really silly; and yet he's a rich man. Isn't he?"

Jane smiled. "Yes, he's rich. But a lot of unintelligent men are, you know. I've worked as secretary to quite a few of them, and three out of four are really only cunning schoolboys. I think the secret behind most of them is repetition. I mean, they learn a trick, and it pays off, and they go on doing that same thing over and over again and get richer and richer, and there they are."

The drinks came. Jane said: "Felix is a special case, though. He has these companies, but they don't add up to all that much; at least I don't see how they can make as much money for him as he seems to spend. I don't know how he does it. Cheers, Ted!"

"Cheers!" I could have told her. But I hadn't mentioned it yet, and I couldn't see that it would help anything for her to know. In fact, it was a knowledge which could prove dangerous.

"Jane, there's another thing I can't understand. I've wondered about it for some time now. Just looking at that man, Lessing I mean, seeing you together particularly, I can't help wondering over and over again how you can bear to . . . have him even *touch* you . . ."

She put her hand on mine and told me: "You'd be surprised how seldom. And when . . . I have to . . . I shut my eyes and try to think it's you. I've always done that, right from the beginning."

She was gripping my hand very tightly and for a moment I thought she was going to cry . . . but only for a second. She pulled herself together, reached behind her for her bag, pulled a handkerchief out of it and blew her nose. What she'd said made me want to ask another question: why had she married the creature in the first place? But I didn't ask it. For one thing, I'd questioned her enough. For another, it came into that no-man's-land, the small span of lost years we hadn't discussed . . . and didn't need to.

Near Sao Hill, short of the turn-off to the hotel, I stopped for an afternoon lunch. I stopped in the first place not to eat but because there were some giraffes not far off the road and I thought I might as well attempt a photograph. I wasn't really in any hurry to start photographing animals, because later on, in the reserves in Kenya, I could get them in many varieties and from all angles; but I was feeling rather guilty at having taken only three or four pictures over all the distance I'd covered. I took two now: one of the five giraffes busily chewing the tops off two unappetising-looking trees, and the second of just one of them, broadside-on, as she galloped away to my left. The other four were already way-off, showing me only their rumps, but this one obviously wanted me to get her profile, a still of that long-legged, graceful gallop. Giraffes are pretty things; they have large, sensitive eyes and soft muzzles, and they move like mannequins. I wished now that I hadn't disturbed them with my close approach for the photograph; if I hadn't, I could have sat and watched them while I ate my sandwiches. Now they'd gone.

In spite of the late start—I'd forgotten, the evening before, when I arrived with Jane, that I had a tyre that had to be fixed, so I'd had to wait in Mbeya that morning while they did it—I'd be in Iringa well before dusk. I didn't want to get there any earlier than I needed to, because I knew that the evening was going to be a lonely one, a dull one, without Jane. So I munched slowly, and then made a fire and boiled coffee—I use a *kaffirpot*, a three-legged thing made of cast iron—and smoked a slow pipe. It was peaceful and, although I was thinking of Jane all the time and missing her, I felt happy and at rest. It came from knowing that within a few weeks, say two months at the most, I'd have her with me for good, with no need, then, for either of us to hide or pretend.

Just a matter of getting through those weeks—that was all. I kept telling myself that it was a very short space of

time, but it still stretched ahead like a half-century—as a school term seems to a child when it starts.

Soon after I'd got going I came to a petrol pump and pulled in off the road. But there was no attendant, only a crudely-lettered notice tied to the pump saying PETROL FINISH. Either there'd been a run on it, or the owner hadn't paid his bill lately. Well, it didn't matter; I could probably get to Iringa on what was left in the tank and, even if it gave out, I had plenty more in cans.

Iringa is built on the top of a cliff; the road is cut into the face of it and climbs steeply, and when you get to the top you're suddenly on the edge of the town. The hotel was half-way up the main street, on the left; there was a garage just opposite, so I filled up with petrol and oil before I went in to see if they could give me a room. They could; I'd been lucky with hotels, all along the way. I signed the book and drove round to the car park at the back, and a room-boy came and took the luggage.

I took a long time in the bath, because there wouldn't be much to do once I got out of it. I lay in the hot water and thought about Jane . . . about this time yesterday, in Mbeya.

I washed a couple of drip-dry shirts, and socks, and hung them over the bath to drip. Then I dressed and went to the bar, and while I drank, perched on a stool, I thought still about Jane, wondering if she and Lessing would at this moment be having their pre-dinner drinks in that other bar two hundred and fifty miles behind me. Well, if the garage people had fixed that differential by now—and certainly they should have done—I'd be seeing her the day after tomorrow, in Dar-es-Salaam.

I had about two drinks more than I really needed before I went in to eat. This hotel was well run and the food was excellent, but I wished I'd had the sense not to stop here. I'd have had more to do and less to drink if I'd camped out in the bush, and on my own it wouldn't have been so

lonely as it was in a degree of civilisation. I might even have stolen a page out of Lessing's book and seen some wild animals; I did, once, not a dozen miles from Iringa, have a lion cross the road in the beam of my headlights.

I went to bed early and slept soundly; in the morning I had a good breakfast and was on the road to Morogoro by eight o'clock. The main road forks at Iringa; it runs due north to Nairobi, through Arusha, and this branch road that I was taking leads off to the right through Morogoro to the coast at Dar-es-Salaam—a stretch of more than three hundred miles, and quite good road all the way except for that part of it, about seventy miles out of Iringa, where it crosses the Ruaha and runs parallel to the river for several miles. Scenically it was attractive, but the corrugations were as bad as they could be. To be comfortable over this sort of surface one must drive at no less than forty miles an hour, preferably about fifty, so that the tyres skim the ridges instead of hammering into the depressions. But here the topsoil was loose; at speed there was danger of skidding, and a skid could easily end up several hundred feet down below the right-hand edge of the road, in the rocky bed of the Great Ruaha. So I took it slowly and winced at the car's agony. It wasn't for long.

Beyond Morogoro the country was absolutely flat. I saw a lot of zebra, and a herd of some sort of buck; back there by the river there'd been a troop of baboons on the road in one place and an angry-looking green monkey beside it in another. That was the total bag for the day's run. I was about forty miles short of Dar-es-Salaam when the rain started ahead of me, and a few seconds later it felt like driving into a solid wall of water; at one time it got so bad that I had to pull into the side of the road and stop, because the windscreen wipers couldn't swing fast enough to cope with the deluge, and I could hardly see the front of the bonnet. Then it eased a bit and I drove on; as I was approaching the town, it stopped altogether, suddenly,

like a tap that had been turned off; the earth and the palms steamed in the blazing sun and the smell was that of a colossal greenhouse, sweet and damp and clinging. I was just as wet as the vegetation along the roadside, but this was from sweat, not rain.

I always have difficulty finding my way into Dar, I mean into the part of it near the harbour where the 'white' hotels and the shops are. I dare say there's a very simple and direct route, but my way, from wherever it is that I go wrong, invariably takes me through long, narrow streets which often turn out to be dead-ends, across market places, past mosques, into strange jumbles of factories, hovels and slaughter-houses. I keep going, and eventually I see a street name that I recognise, or a glimpse of water or a ship's masts; then I know where I am and it's plain sailing to the Pan Africa Hotel.

Once again, I was lucky: they could put me up . . . in a vast double room adjoined by an enclosed balcony large enough to throw a dance in, with a private bathroom about forty feet long. Before I unpacked I went out again and took the car round to the garage which had the Dodge agency; I asked them to service it, change all its oils and scrape off the mud. Then I walked back to the hotel and had tea sent up to my room. I drank it stretched out in a grass chair on the balcony, thinking that at about this time Jane and the fat man she was temporarily tied to would be arriving at Iringa. I had to fill in a night and a day and then I'd see her.

That evening I went to a cinema; after it, I found the bar still open and had a nightcap of whisky which probably helped me to sleep well, naked under a mosquito net with the big wooden fan turning steadily, squeaking softly and rhythmically, above it. I woke early in the morning, thinking of Jane. . . .

Dar-es-Salaam is less than a hundred years old. Its name means 'Haven of Peace', and it was founded as a

trading port in 1862 by the Sultan of Zanzibar. The Arabs never made much of it because they preferred to use Bagamoyo, just up the coast, as their dhow port; but at the turn of the century the Germans decided they needed a port with space and deep-draught berths for steamships, and that was how the place began to be developed. For all the shortness of its history, there are some fascinating old buildings with great wooden doors carved and studded in Zanzibar fashion—in fact, a lot that was worth photographing, from the point of view of Jimmy Townsend's wants. I spent the morning with my camera, seeking out these subjects. Then, after lunch, since the Dodge was ready, I drove out of town along the coast road past Oyster Bay, and photographed seascapes through bending palms; a travel book has to have that sort of thing in it somewhere. I'd taken my swimming trunks and one of the hotel towels with me, so on the way back I stopped at Oyster Bay again and swam, and lay in the sun, and thought about Jane. I was still on the beach when the sun went down; the tide was rising and sandcrabs were popping in and out of their holes, while the palms' shadows lengthened towards the creeping edge of surf.

I pulled on my shirt and trousers, left the almost deserted curve of beach, and drove back into the town. As I parked outside the front of the hotel I noticed that all the tables on the paved part outside were occupied; it was Saturday night, of course, the night for parties and cinemas. I rolled the towel up small so that the people in the reception office wouldn't recognise it—hotels don't like their towels to be taken on to beaches, for some reason—and went and collected my key. I turned away from the desk and had just passed through the doorway into the inside drinking area—a paved courtyard open to the sky, full of tables and chairs where people sat to have their tea or drinks or coffee after meals—and had noticed briefly that it was packed full of people, with a hum of talk and

laughter, and waiters scuttling to and fro with trays of glasses. I knew nobody in Dar-es-Salaam, so I wasn't looking at faces; I was just aware of hundreds of them as I headed between the tables, aiming for the stairs on the far side, when a woman's voice called my name. It was Jane's voice. She was sitting by herself at a table that had two chairs at it, close to a pillar; at the next table four youths were hunched around a stack of beer bottles and I saw the disappointed looks on their faces as I went up to her table and sat down in the empty chair.

"Jane, how *lovely*!" Her hand was warm. "How long have you been here?"

"*Here . . .*"—she patted the table—"about three-quarters of an hour. I was just going; I thought you'd never come, and those awful boys keep staring at me."

"You're an exceptionally attractive female, and it's Saturday night in a hot climate with a shortage of women. You might as well get used to being leered at. Where is . . . Lessing?"

Jane looked at me, smiling, apparently holding back her answer. At that moment a waiter came up and asked us if we wanted anything. Well, I wasn't properly dressed for a public place after sundown, but I was thirsty from the sun and the salt water I'd absorbed. Jane wanted a tomato juice, and I ordered a cold beer. When the man left us, I told Jane: "I'm not in a fit state to sit here with you." She had on the same cotton frock that she'd worn at the Rest House in Rumpi, and she looked cool and fresh. "After this drink I must go up and have a bath and change."

She was still wearing that smile. "I'll come up with you, if you like, and scrub your back."

I stared at her. I supposed she was joking, but there was something behind it—a reason for that smile. She watched the puzzlement in my face and suddenly she laughed.

TED'S STORY-X

Then she leant over towards me and said quietly: "He's gone, Ted. He caught a plane to Tanga, or Mombasa, I'm not sure which. But he'll be away at least two days. We're by ourselves, d'you see?"

TED'S STORY—XI

THE WAITER CAME and set the glasses down, and I paid him, but the action wasn't a conscious one; my thoughts were away on their own. He went away and Jane was sitting back in her chair, watching me.

"Aren't you glad, Ted?"

Glad? I wasn't thinking of her and me, my mind was on Lessing and his cargo. She'd said Tanga or Mombasa. Whichever of the two places he'd been aiming for, he'd be there by now. I couldn't possibly pick up his trail by driving on after him, and I couldn't afford to fly; even if I could have, and found out first from the airways people which place he'd booked to, I probably wouldn't find him when I got there. For one thing, he could be almost anywhere along about four hundred miles of coast, and wherever he was, knowing the nature of his business, I felt certain that he wouldn't be advertising his presence. For another, since he'd told Jane he'd be away for only about two days, he'd be back here by the time I started looking for him.

For a moment I thought of taking my story to the police in Dar-es-Salaam, but I chucked that idea out immediately. First of all, I'd no evidence and they wouldn't believe me. Second, they'd want to know why I hadn't done anything about it four days ago. The question was one I couldn't answer satisfactorily, even to myself; and how could I tell a policeman that the reason I'd done nothing was that the only thought in my head at that time had been whether the man's wife knew what he was up to? It wouldn't make

sense; and, if it did, the conclusion would be that I was an accessory after the fact.

There wasn't anything at all that I could do. Lessing had got away with it. By 'it', I mean that chain-gang of helpless, terrified women. I could have done something, at one point, and I hadn't; if I'd actively helped Lessing, driven the van for him, for instance, I'd only be a stage or two deeper in responsibility. It wasn't a pleasant thought.

"*Ted!*" Jane was looking at me as if my face had turned blue or my eyes had crossed. "I've been waiting here nearly an hour to tell you, looking forward to how happy you'd be, and all you do is stare into space as if you were sorry you found me alone!"

"I'm sorry, Jane. Of course it's lovely, it's . . ." This wasn't easy. I needed a few moments to discipline my mind into putting Lessing and his affairs out of it. I was fumbling for a way to excuse my failure to react as she'd naturally expected. If I could have told her the whole thing, it would have been easy; but I couldn't. Now, with no hope at all of catching him or of having him caught, there was even less point in telling her. And it was still just as dangerous for her to know.

"It's just that it's such a surprise and I hardly understand . . . how . . . why on earth he'd . . ."—my brain was beginning to work, at last—"leave you alone, knowing I'm here? He hates me, Jane; he's made it quite plain in his own stupid way that he's suspicious of me . . . with you, I mean . . . I think he knows I want to take you from him. That night in Mbeya when he came in to dinner, it was almost as if he knew we'd . . ."

"He did." She was with me now, relaxed again; my lapse was forgotten or forgiven. "He *does* know."

I picked up my beer. I'd forgotten about it. "How?"

"My blouse was split down the back, along the seam behind one shoulder. It could have happened anyway; I'd

had it for years and the stuff was practically rotten. But he found it when he was changing for dinner and, when we went to bed that night, he'd hardly shut the door before he asked me how it had got torn . . . and I blushed. I couldn't help it, my face really burned. I showed him how old it was, how it tore so easily anywhere. He had to accept it but I could see he didn't, not really."

"Then it's all the more odd that now . . ."

She shook her head. "This is some business thing, Ted. I don't know what, but it's important. Business comes first with Felix. I'm important to him, too, but I don't rate that high. He hardly spoke to me from the time we left Mbeya, and at the next place . . . you know, oh . . ."

"Iringa."

"Yes, Iringa. The moment we got there, he rushed in and put a call through to the airways office here and booked a seat on today's flight to Tanga."

"You said Tanga or Mombasa."

"Yes. He told me Mombasa but I was passing the office when the call came through and he was talking to them and having to shout—I suppose the line isn't too good—and he booked to Tanga." She shrugged. "I don't see that it matters; he'd changed his mind, I suppose. Then when we got here he just dropped me and my luggage and he didn't even come inside; he drove straight on out to the airport. He must have caught the plane by the skin of his teeth."

"Sure he caught it?"

"But of course. He'd have been back here hours ago if he hadn't. Ted, you're not frightened of him, are you?" Her eyes were laughing.

"Certainly not." Perhaps I was; but then I knew more about him, in one way, than she did. In any case, the suggestion from the point of her making it, and her amusement, irritated me. "I wanted to take you away before this. It seemed to me—in fact it still does—that since

there has to be a bust-up it might as well have been then, or now, as later on when you're back in Johannesburg. It was your idea to . . . to leave it over. I'm trying to do what you asked me to do, that's all . . ." She frowned, and I drank what was left of my beer. The waiter'd been watching us, and now he moved forward; I waved him off. "Jane, if you've changed your mind, let me take you away now. Come up to Kenya with me." It was a lovely idea and it excited me; I'd forgotten Lessing and the thing that went with him. "Jane . . . *will you?*"

"No, Ted, I can't." She was very definite, herself, now, seemingly frightened at the suggestion. "I can't explain, Ted; you must just believe me that I *can't*."

"Intuition?"

"If you like. . . . Do you want your back scrubbed?"

We were in the bath together, eating oranges, when I thought of the Ocean Grove. It's a dinner-dance place, out along the coast to the north. It would be nice to dress up, and feel civilised, and dance to a good band. I mentioned the idea to Jane and she loved it.

"Ted, it'd be heavenly!" She submerged, suddenly, to wash off the juice that had been running down her front. She looked better than ever, with her hair up.

It was a long bath. This hotel was built by the Germans, when they ruled Tanganyika, and everything in it was outsize. Whether colonial Germans were outsize, or whether they just liked space, I don't know, but I was grateful to them. Jane sat up and stretched out her hand for the soap and I passed it over.

"I hope I can get a dress pressed. What about booking? Won't it be crowded at the week-end?"

"I'll telephone. We'll get in somehow."

She nodded. "Say you're the Governor's aide-de-camp."

"With someone else's wife?"

"They'll expect that. Does that shower thing work, do you think?"

"Doubt it." It was one of those telephone-showers, a tube bound in shiny metal. I tried it, but it was true to its breed, it didn't work; just spouted out of holes in the tube, near the taps, and made a mess of the floor.

When I got my call through to the Ocean Grove they laughed politely at the idea of anyone having the cheek to try to book a table for a Saturday night at such short notice. I laughed with them, and asked them to put the manager on the line. The manager, they said, was busy. I told them to go and ask him if he was too busy to speak to the editor of *Madame*. About a minute later it was the manager talking to me.

I should explain that *Madame* is a glossy woman's magazine published in South Africa. It sells all over the continent, in all the parts of it, that is, where women speak English or some form of it. It covers all the usual women's magazine subjects, and it includes a monthly article on places in which the editor thinks the dining and wining are good. I knew the editor, a man called Mattson, and hotel keepers and restaurant managers are always kind to him. The voice on the telephone asked me: "Did I understand that you are the editor of *Madame*?"

"Why, yes, if I mentioned it. My name's Mattson. I'm just passing through, on my way up to Kenya, and although we weren't able to book in advance I've heard of your Ocean Grove and my wife and I thought we'd like to have dinner there. But, of course, if it's . . ."

"That's perfectly all right, Mr Mattson. I'll have a nice table for you. Can you give me any idea what time you'll be arriving?"

"Oh . . . in about an hour?"

"We'll be happy to welcome you, Mr Mattson."

I didn't laugh until I'd put the phone down. Then I

went up and knocked on Jane's door and she called: "Who is it?" Her room was on the side of the hotel, towards the back of it, about fifty yards away from mine, but it had the same layout. I found her on the balcony, all dressed and ready; she had on that green silk dress that she'd worn in the 'Auberge Bleu', in Salisbury, and she looked marvellous.

"You're beautiful, Jane. Absolutely beautiful. There aren't words for how lovely you are."

"I hope you won't look at me like that in public."

"Why ever not?"

"You make me feel naked! Did you get a table?"

"I did. Let's go down and have a drink. I thought we'd have one here, then stop at a place on the way; Palm Breeze, it's called. No point getting to the other place too early."

Conversation ceased in the courtyard as we crossed it and went into the bar. I doubt if Dar-es-Salaam had ever seen anything so startlingly lovely as Jane. The bar was quite full; the crowd of drinkers cleared a space for us and two of them got off their stools so we could sit. Neither of them looked as if they made a habit of doing that sort of thing. Jane smiled at them and said 'Thank you', and both of them looked as if they'd faint if she spoke to them again. The crowd edged in again around us while we had our drinks; if they spoke at all, they spoke in whispers, so we could only talk about things like the weather and the state of the roads and which breeds of dog we liked best. I told her about Bill Swanson's dog, that very long and intelligent mongrel he called Pretzel; Jane hadn't met Pretzel but she remembered Swanson, she'd met him at that cocktail party, the . . . I forget their name . . . I mean, that party where I'd met her for the first time.

I've often thought of that. If I hadn't gone to that party with Penny—and I only went because she wanted to—Jane and Bill might have got to know each other and

THE YELLOW FORD

eventually they might even have fallen in love and got married to each other. They were getting on very well, I remember, when I butted in, and then Bill shoved off with some flea in his ear and we were left together. But if that had happened, I mean Bill and Jane—and it might have if I hadn't been there—I wouldn't have been away when Penny had her tennis party, and I'd have stopped her overdoing it so that she wouldn't have caught the chill that killed her; she and I would still be married, and Jane and Bill Swanson might now be our best friends, meeting us at cocktail parties.

At the Palm Breeze it wasn't so crowded. This was a place where people came in ties and long trousers—a smart little bar, and all the parties in it included women—not the dense crowd of stag drinkers that congregate in the bar of the Pan Africa. There was a space for us on the wall seat near the outside door, and a low table in front of us, and since they had their wives and girl-friends with them the men couldn't stare too openly at Jane. We should have come here in the first place. Here I could order a pink gin and know that it wouldn't arrive blood-red.

We spent an hour in the Palm Breeze, and watched the gecko lizards on the wall in front of us, and talked of all sorts of things, such as where we'd like to live and how many children we wanted and whether, if Lessing refused to divorce her, she'd change her name to Carpenter by deed poll. I'd taken that for granted whenever I'd thought about it, but she had other ideas; she said, if either of us had to change their name in such an artificial way, why shouldn't we both do it, each of us change to some name that we liked. Just think, she said, of the choice we'd have. My name reminded her of hammers and glue. We spent quite a long time thinking up new surnames; it was fun, and we had some wonderful ideas, but few of them were anything but farcical and we couldn't agree on any that

weren't. But Jane was resigned to the glue and chisel; she seemed oddly certain that Lessing would let her go. From what I knew of him I could hardly envisage that, but she knew him better than I did, except in that one sense; and in any case it didn't, so far as I was concerned, matter two hoots or even one whether he agreed or not. In the middle of these thoughts a criminal one occurred to me—that with the knowledge I possessed I could force him into it. Two things caused me to reject that idea in the moment of its birth: the first, that while I am capable of many and perhaps most misdeeds, blackmail was one that I would find difficult to use even in this cause and even against Lessing; the second, that, having no evidence whatsoever, I had, in fact, no such weapon to my hand.

On the way to the Ocean Grove I told Jane that whatever name we finally settled on, for the rest of this evening we were Mr and Mrs Mattson. She said she wouldn't dream of it; she'd rather be Mrs Thrushingbird-Thursday. I'd mentioned this to her; it was the nickname we'd given, years ago at school when I was about twelve years old, to a boy whose real name was Massingbird-Mundy. I had to explain to Jane that I wasn't joking now, that we really had to be called Mattson tonight, and why. She was tickled at the deception.

"How on earth did you think of it?"

"Oh, I've done it before. It's dead safe, because Mattson never goes out of Cape Town. And if the place is any good, I send him a paragraph for his magazine. So in the long run the whole thing's really quite honest."

"Oh." She was disappointed; it wasn't a proper hoax, after all.

Music floated out and met us before we were inside the door, and it was music from a good band. A smiling man in a white dinner jacket came up to us and bowed to Jane and shook my hand as if he'd been waiting to meet me for

years. I suppose he knew who we were, or rather who he thought we were, because in a place the size of Dar-es-Salaam he'd not have many customers whom he didn't know only too well.

"We're so glad to have you, Mr Mattson." He looked back at Jane. "It's a very great pleasure."

Jane smiled at him. "It's sweet of you to have let us in at such short notice, Mr . . ."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. My name's Halkett. I'm delighted that we were able to, Mrs Mattson. Well, may I show you to your table?"

He led us to it. The place was certainly full. Jane followed Halkett and I followed Jane and the whole room was looking at Jane.

It was an excellent table, set for two, but big enough for three or four. There were flowers on it and candles; no other table had flowers. It was set well back, not too close to anyone else, but still in easy reach of the dance floor. There was a window behind us, and through it, before we sat down, I saw the black, graceful silhouettes of palms against the sea and the clear night sky. The windows were open and a cool breeze drifted in with a scent of moon-flowers in it; it made the flames flutter on the candles. Our chairs were placed so that we could both see the whole room and the dance floor.

Halkett gave us menus, told the head waiter to give us his constant attention, and weaved silently away between the tables. We ordered our food and the head waiter was very helpful; then I asked him to bring me a wine list and he beamed and told me that he'd sent for it. The band was playing 'The Nearness Of You'; this might have been Lifemanship on the part of the manager but in fact was an extraordinary coincidence, because it was an old favourite of mine (1940, I think), and I'd bought a record of it again in Cape Town and Jane and I used to dance to it in her flat in Sea Point. The band at the High Noon Hotel had

played it for us, too, on the night that Penny caught her chill thirty miles away—the night Jane and I had decided that we weren't going to hide any more.

I told the waiter that I'd order the wine when we came back, and we went to dance. When we returned to our table, several tunes and about ten minutes later, Halkett was there behind a silver-plated bucket on a stand, and he was prising the wire mesh off a bottle of champagne. There was a second bottle in the bucket of ice. The wine waiter and the head waiter held our chairs back for us and Halkett murmured: "With the compliments of the Ocean Grove, Mr Mattson."

When they were all out of earshot, Jane whispered: "Aren't they rather overdoing it? I mean, it's lovely, but if they found out, after all this, we'd have to wash the dishes for a month!"

I laughed. "I'd have to get time off to go and explain to your husband: 'Jane has secured a post in the kitchen of the Ocean Grove. She was so bored without you, she had to do *something*.' "

"But seriously, Ted . . ."

"Don't worry. I'll write to Mattson and send him a whole article. I promise you."

She was satisfied with that. We had a wonderful evening; the champagne was perfect and the food was some of the best I've ever had in Africa. The band seemed to choose all the tunes we liked, and it was an easy band to dance to. I'm not a good dancer—I don't know the first thing about the right steps or anything of that sort—but I keep in time and I don't often tread on anyone's foot. But with Jane I always feel that I'm dancing very well. It may be that I enjoy dancing with her so much that I don't know what my feet are doing. And there was one quality in the evening that was not provided by either the band or the management; it's a thing that Jane produces herself; I can only describe it as a sort of 'glow'. If we'd been eating

fish-and-chips and drinking cold tea, she'd have done the same thing to the atmosphere.

I'd have asked the manager to join us for a glass of his own wine, but I was apprehensive that the conversation might get a bit too close to *Madame*. So I avoided that danger, and we did our best to make up for it by thanking him profusely at the end of the evening, congratulating him on everything under the sun and promising that *Madame* would have more than a few words to say about the Ocean Grove.

It was a lovely night, with the stars very clear and bright in the sky, the sea glossy and whispering beyond the palms and the curve of white sand. Jane said that it looked so nice that she'd like to walk along the beach, now, with nobody else about; so I stopped at Oyster Bay where I'd swum that afternoon, and we went down to the hard sand at the water's edge. Jane took off her shoes and stockings and let the water run over her feet.

"It's heavenly, Ted. We should have brought our swimming things."

"Do we need them?"

"People only do that in books. Besides, anyone could see us from the road, we'd have an audience in no time. And our clothes'd get all full of sand and there's nothing to dry on . . ." She stopped. "We *could* go back to the hotel and fetch our things . . ."

"Uh-huh? When we get back to the hotel I have just one simple thought in my head."

She laughed, wriggling her feet in the water. "I have that in mind, too. I have had all evening. Is that as awful as it sounds? I love you such a lot, Ted. With all of me."

I stretched out my hand and she took it and I pulled her up on to dry sand and kissed her.

"They can see us from the road, Ted."

"Let them!" It was a long kiss and we were both lost in it when a wavelet from the rising tide swept up higher

than any had come before and soaked my shoes and the bottoms of my trousers. "Oh, blast it! Let's go back to the hotel, Jane. *Now!*"

She nodded. "*Now!*" I kissed her again; this was like some sort of drug, once you started it you couldn't stop. We did it again up on the grass bank under the palms; they were moving very slightly in the breeze, and the fronds creaked and rustled over our heads. Jane said: "Nobody'd think we were married, Ted. I'm sure they couldn't have in that restaurant, either. Married people don't neck in public, on dance-floors."

"Don't they? *We* will. All our lives."

"I hope so."

As we drove into the town I thought about that, and I wondered if perhaps it might be better for us, in the long run, if Lessing refused to divorce Jane, so that we wouldn't be able to get married. Then neither of us could ever get boringly certain of possession; it'd keep both of us on our toes.

We got our keys from the porter's office and went to our own rooms. I undressed quickly and wrapped a towel round my middle and washed, and then, out of consideration for Jane's complexion, shaved. Then I went out on to the balcony and enjoyed the feel of the cool night air on my bare skin. From here I looked down on the front entrance of the hotel and could see the Dodge where I'd parked it in the line of cars on the other side of the road, then about thirty yards of dark road and grass and trees, and the edge of the harbour. Close in, a dozen or more sailing dinghies lay peacefully at their buoys, and in mid-stream a big freighter lay moored with lighters clustered along her side.

Behind me the door opened and shut quietly, and I heard the flopping of Jane's slippers as she crossed the room and came out on to the balcony. She looked surprisingly small without her high heels, defenceless in the thin silk dressing-

gown. She stood with me against the low front wall, looking down at the harbour.

"It's so lovely, so peaceful, Ted." I turned her round and kissed her. After a minute she put her hands on my face and pushed me away. "Ted, you sweet thing; you've shaved!" I took hold of one end of the sash of her dressing-gown and loosened the knot; the silk gown fell open. She slipped it off and let it fall behind her. I reached out to pull her close again, but she stopped me. "Hey: not so fast!" She was frowning at the towel I was wearing. "You're overdressed, Carpenter."

We made love on the couch on the balcony. Then we slept, but I woke again and the air felt cold, so I carried Jane inside and put her in my bed, inside the mosquito net, and she didn't waken. It had been cold out on the balcony, but in here it was stuffy and we needed the overhead fan. I lay on my back listening to its friendly squeak; Jane was sleeping as soundly as a baby, her breathing soft and warm against my throat. The perfume she'd worn this evening lingered delicately around her, and the cumulative effect of sensation and sound and scent was so delicious that I felt I'd like to stay awake all night to enjoy it. But I must have fallen back into sleep quite soon.

What awoke me was a loud knocking on the door. I was aware, in the second of waking, that it was daylight and that this would be the room-boy knocking with morning tea and that last night I hadn't remembered to lock the door. I shouted, frantically: "No!" But it made no difference; very few of these Coast servants speak much English. The door opened and the boy came in, grinning. At the same moment I realised that I was alone in the bed; Jane must have left while I was still asleep.

"Jambo, Bwana. Bwana tea."

"Jambo." I pointed at the table. "Put it down there, will you?"

"Ndiyo, Bwana."

Her perfume was still strong on the pillow. When the boy had gone, I buried my face in it and wished that she'd come back.

We met after breakfast. When I came out of the dining-room I went to the reception office and sent a message up to her room, and she came down almost straight away. She hadn't wanted breakfast, just the tea they'd brought her. We wandered out across the road towards the harbour, and I told her of my own experience with the tea, and she laughed.

"I thought I'd been rather clever, leaving you asleep."

"You left your perfume behind and it nearly drove me mad. It was such a short night: I feel cheated."

"Surfeit of champagne. I always sleep like a log after it."

"I'll remember that. Look, I thought we might drive up to Bagamoyo this morning. Feel like it?" She said she'd love to. I fetched my camera and we started at once. It was well worth it; being so much older than Dar-es-Salaam, it had far more buildings of interest; in fact, I could scrap most of the photographs I'd taken the morning before, in Dar-es-Salaam. Besides, I had Jane with me, and I used her as a model in some of the pictures.

The dining-room was about to close when we got back, so we just had cold meats and salad and the staff were glad to see us go outside to coffee. While we were having it, Jane said she'd like to go swimming.

I shook my head, firmly. "Not now, darling. Later, about tea-time."

She looked surprised. "Oh? What if I *want* to swim now? You can't lay down the law yet, not until we're married. I'm not sure you'll be able to then, either!"

I laughed. "It just happens that the tide is right out. We'd have to walk about a mile over rocks that were specially designed by Allah to lacerate the feet of un-

believers. But in a few hours' time, it'll be fine."

"Oh. I see. Then . . ."

"Let's rest. It's the sensible way to spend a Sunday afternoon in this climate."

Jane put her coffee-cup down in its saucer and edged her chair back an inch so that she could stand up. I jumped up and pulled the chair out. She said, quietly: "Better let me go up first, Ted." I nodded. She added: "But don't be *too* long."

"I'll let you get out of sight, but I'll still beat you to the door."

"Ted!" Then she'd gone, towards the stairs, and I'll swear she'd blushed.

We came down at about four and drank a cup of tea before we drove out to Oyster Bay to swim and laze on the beach. There were a lot of other people doing the same things but it didn't matter; we didn't see them. When the sun was on its way down, we went back to the Pan Africa and had ice-cold drinks outside, on the patio or whatever they call it, and then we went up to my room and shared a bath and made love and then got back in the bath and finished off the last of the oranges. I'd bought them in the Indian market on that first morning, when I'd been taking photographs and wondering when Jane and Lessing would arrive. It seemed ridiculous to think that it was only yesterday I'd been doing that.

I was drying Jane's back for her when she said: "Ted . . ."

"'M? Dry enough?"

"I expect so." She turned round. "Ted, I think we must start being sensible now."

"Meaning?"

"Felix *could* be back at any time now. We mustn't take silly risks, Ted, it'd be too awful if . . ."

"He said he'd be away two days. So far it's only one. We've got tonight, at least, haven't we?"

"He *said* two days, but there's no certainty about it. I don't even know where he went! Ted, darling, do try to see it my way. It'd be frightful, here in a public hotel, there'd be no keeping anything quiet . . ."

"I see." I sat on the edge of the bath and pulled her on to my knees and kissed her smooth, tanned shoulders. "You mean you don't want to sleep with me tonight?"

"It's not a question of not wanting. It's . . . I told you . . ."

"I know. I won't fight you about it."

"You're sweet to me, Ted."

"We'll get our supper as soon as they open the mess, and come straight up. Then you can be back in your room at bedtime. Is that all right?"

She arched back, looking at me. Then she smiled. "All right."

I could have sung for joy. To have to end, abruptly, not to be able to love her again from this moment on into all the dreary weeks or even months that we were going to be apart from each other . . . well, to go back to school again, a minute ago I'd felt like a schoolboy being told at the end of the sixth week of his seven-week summer holiday that he had to go back to school, at once, now! In the back of my mind I'd been dreading the movement of the hours that brought us closer and closer to the separation. I'd been trying not to think of it, to smother the sound of its approach by living every minute of the present.

"We'll have wine for dinner. Let's not bother about drinks first; we'll go straight in and have a bottle of wine."

"Can we afford it?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I'll be an expensive wife. And we had enough last night to last the Don Cossacks a month."

"Oh. Well, tonight we'll have the bottle I'd have bought last night if the Ocean Grove hadn't given us two for nothing."

"Not for nothing, Ted. You mustn't forget to write that article. You really mustn't."

"I won't. I'll have plenty of time, Jane. Too damn much time. It's there in front like a great, black swamp."

She came to me across the room, half-dressed, and put her arms round my neck. "Ted, it won't be all that long. You mustn't think about it."

"I know. I'm trying not to. That's why I couldn't stand the idea of us just ending, here and now. I wasn't only . . ."

"Darling, I know. Do you think I don't feel the same?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too. I wonder how many times we'll say that to each other before we're atomised?"

"It's a question for an electronic brain. Let's be quick, now; the dining-room'll be open in a minute."

Sunday night meals are seldom the best that hotels produce, but we were both hungry enough to enjoy this one, and the wine helped it down. We had coffee outside, and then I climbed the stairs to my room while Jane went to the reception desk to ask if there'd been any messages from her husband. When she joined me, about twenty minutes later, she told me that they hadn't heard anything from him. I supposed they wouldn't much care, in any case; Lessing was paying the full double rate for his room whether he used it himself or not and, so far as the management were concerned, he could arrive when he liked; he wouldn't have to let them know. They had a guest who was paying for three meals a day and not eating any of them; I dare say they'd have been delighted to have the place booked full with others like him.

Jane stayed longer than she'd meant to. There'd been a quality of sadness, almost of finality; she'd cried, once, as she had in Mbeya. I drank her tears and while I was still kissing her wet face, that uncontrollable state of—oh, does one label it, explain it?—the *mood* passed, and she was at

once angry with herself for having succumbed to it and determined now to display a gaiety to compensate it. But the contrived gaiety was sadder than tears, infinitely sad for both of us, so that when at last she pretended to see my bedside clock for the first time and to be shocked at how long she'd stayed, there was relief for us both in her going. Yet when she stood with her hand on the door, the door so vast a frame to her slimness and smallness, her vulnerability in the flimsy dressing-gown, I could have cried myself.

As it was, I closed the door behind her and stood quite still until my head stopped swimming. I crossed the room and found my pipe and filled it, too much aware of how badly I'd handled the evening, of how wrong I'd been to persuade her into this dismal, sexual failure of a farewell. I lit the pipe and went out on to the balcony and leant against the balustrade and looked over through the palms at the edge of the harbour. That freighter was still there and the lighters still lay alongside it. Then I looked down at the front of the hotel; and saw the yellow Ford.

TED'S STORY-XII

IT WASN'T ON THE PARKING VERGE, that wide strip of bare earth on the other side of the road; it was in the road itself, parked immediately opposite the hotel entrance.

My pipe, barely lit, had gone out. I ran into the bedroom and began to dress as fast as I could. I didn't lock the door; if Lessing came to my room now, which he might reasonably do if Jane hadn't got back to her room before he reached it, if there was a knock I'd call "Come in" and let it be thought that I was *undressing*, going to bed. That reminded me of the bed; I straightened its covers, quickly, and tucked the mosquito net in neatly all round. Then I finished putting on the clothes I'd been wearing at dinner-time, and checked the room quickly for any sign that Jane might have left of her presence in it. She'd left nothing; not even, unless you put your head close to the pillows, a trace of her perfume.

I stepped out into the corridor and locked the room behind me. Then I walked quietly along the passage to the right. It involved passing the head of the main staircase and I might have run into Lessing. As it happened, I met nobody. I passed the top of the stairs and went on down the long corridor to where it was joined by a short cross-passage which linked it to the passage and rooms on the other side. Jane's room was close to that other intersection, and from here, if there'd been any sort of trouble, even a slightly raised voice inside her room, I'd have heard it. But there wasn't a sound. After I'd waited there for a minute, hovering like a housebreaker at the corner of the

passage, listening and hearing nothing, I walked on down to the end of this long passage and across to the other side of the hotel through the next joining one. From here I could look right back along that corridor off which one room was Jane's. But it was completely empty and all the rooms' doors were shut.

I went down the back stairs and then walked this way again, along the ground floor passage, towards the front of the hotel. The central courtyard was almost deserted; a young man was reading a book under one of the circling fans, a thin man and a fat woman were drinking tea, or coffee, at a table just inside the entrance. There was only one waiter in sight; he was leaning with his back against a pillar and he had his eyes shut. I strolled into the bar, which was off this end of the courtyard.

"I'm close." The Goanese barman eyed me without enthusiasm. "Bar all close, now."

I looked at the clock, and it said the same as my watch. I told him: "There are five minutes to go. Give me a whisky and soda, please."

He glanced up at the clock-face and shrugged. "Lucky I hadn't lock up yet. Sunday night . . ."

I watched him jerk the top off the soda bottle. "It must be boring, I dare say. You have a drink?"

He shook his head. Then: "Yes, Coca-Cola, please." I paid for the round, then sipped my Scotch.

"Have you been empty all evening?"

"All, no. Early on, there's everyday some. But the last hour, hour-half, nobody came. People early bedtime, Sunday."

"Well . . ." I finished the drink, "that's for me, too. Good night."

I don't think he answered. I walked across the courtyard and up the main staircase and into my room. I didn't lock the door; if Jane was in trouble, now or later, she might want to come to me. I felt cut-off from her,

especially in this room. I walked out on to the balcony and looked over the edge and I saw that the yellow car had gone.

I puzzled over it while I relit my pipe. I could see only one solution. Lessing must have arrived just before I first went out on to the balcony; probably between the time of my shutting the door behind Jane and putting the first match to this briar. When I'd been goggling at his car, he'd most likely have been signing the register while the porter carried his bags up to the room. Then, while I was frantically dressing myself and making the bed, Lessing would have gone out and moved his car from the road in front to the parking area at the side, which I couldn't see from here but which was under the balcony of his room, where he could keep an eye on it. From there he could have come into the hotel through the side entrance, by the outside bar, and been in his room by the time I came out to see what was happening.

It was the only possible set of answers that fitted. If it was the right one, from now on I was prepared to believe in all Jane's powers of intuition, and it would constitute one of the most remarkable pieces of coincidental timing I'd ever heard of. Well, coincidences *do* happen, and even if this one was extraordinary, I couldn't work out a single alternative theory. It just couldn't have been any other way.

I finished my pipe, undressed for the second time that evening, and went to bed alone for the first time in forty-eight hours. But I felt much better than I had an hour ago; I knew, or at any rate I felt sure, that Jane was all right; she must have been in her room when Lessing arrived, and if his cases had been carried up ahead of him (which was likely, since he'd left the car in the road at first; there'd have been no point in his going upstairs and then having to come straight down to move the car, and the porter who had the bags would have had no reason to wait for Lessing

before he took them up) she'd have had, after the first shock of seeing them, some minutes in which to compose herself, perhaps even to run a bath and get into it. Another reason I had for feeling better about the situation was that with Lessing's arrival my cue had plainly come to leave; I wouldn't have to hang around wanting Jane and not being able to do anything about it for fear of his sudden return; and my going would be one step nearer to return, to the drive south. . . .

I used the other bed, because I didn't want to smell that faintly perfumed pillow.

I slept later than usual. After breakfast I went along to the reception desk and mentioned that I'd be leaving either today or early tomorrow. The girl looked things up on a chart and said she was sorry, but today was the limit of my booking. I couldn't move to another room, either, because every one of them was full. There were, of course, other hotels. Perhaps . . .

I told her it didn't matter. If I had to stay for another night in Dar-es-Salaam, as long as I could use the hotel's dining-room and clean up in one of their public bathrooms, I'd sleep in the Dodge. She said she didn't think the manager would have any objection to that.

I asked her if Mr Lessing had arrived last night. Mr Lessing? Oh, no. Definitely he hadn't. I thanked her for this information and I thought: I suppose he didn't sign the register, and as they haven't yet come down to breakfast nobody knows he's here. I must remember to seem surprised when I see him. The girl murmured, conversationally: "I'm quite sure, you see, because *Mrs* Lessing left this morning."

"She . . . did you say she's *left*? How *could* she? Surely . . ."

"She *has* left, Mr Carpenter. There was a telephone call for her, very early, before this office was open. The man

said it was terribly urgent. It so happened that our manager took the call; they go through to his apartment when the exchange is shut and he can put them through to the public phone if he needs to, you see. So he went up and knocked on her door and told her she was wanted, but Mrs Lessing said it couldn't be all that urgent, and she wasn't dressed, of course, and would he take a message and she'd ring back later." The receptionist giggled. "So Mr Blenkinsop goes all the way down to the phone again and tells this to the caller . . ."

"Was it her husband?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr Carpenter. But I don't think it could have been, because he wouldn't give his name or any message, he just said it was terribly important, a matter of life and death sort of, and she *must* come down, no matter *what*. Mr Blenkinsop was fed up, I can tell you, running up and down stairs like a messenger boy almost before sunrise, and he nearly told this man to go to—well, he was that fed up, but he thought to himself, p'haps it really *is* urgent, and then where'd I be if I just hung up on him? So up he goes again and this time Mrs Lessing says all right, she'll be down in a minute, and she did come down, too, in her dressing-gown and slippers and looking very worried, so Mr Blenkinsop told me. He'd put the call on to that public telephone by the bottom of the stairs, and she wasn't on it for long; then she comes to him, he was opening up this office, you see, like he always does just before me or the other receptionist comes on duty, and she tells him that she has to leave at once and is that all right? Well, we always need more rooms than we've got so that doesn't matter; Mr Blenkinsop thought it was very strange, but of course it's none of our business when the guests leave or where they go to or why, not so long as they pay their bills first. Mrs Lessing told him there was a car coming for her at once, well, in half-an-hour at most, and she goes back up to her room and in no

more than fifteen minutes there's a car at the door and the Indian driver asking one of our boys to tell Mrs Lessing her car's come. She's down in five minutes and all her luggage packed and ready too. That's gospel, Mr Carpenter!"

"She'd paid her bill?"

"Oh, yes! You can't get out of this place without doing *that*, Mr Carpenter!"

"Are you sure she didn't leave any message here for me? A note?"

The girl turned to the board on the wall of the office and looked closely at the folded notes and envelopes that were tucked into the criss-crossed elastic. She shook her head and went to the other board, which was bigger and had hooks for room keys and a sort of pocket for letters under each hook. I'd already seen that there was nothing for my number.

I wasn't only baffled by what she'd told me; I was hurt that, whatever had been the reason for Jane rushing off like this, she hadn't thought to leave a message for me, and frightened for her. Lessing hadn't been back; yet I'd seen his car last night, I'd *seen* it, I wasn't mad, you can't *imagine* a thing like that! Nor could one regard the two phenomena, the car's appearance and Jane's sudden flight, as separate. . . .

The receptionist was looking at me with a worried frown on her face. "Are you all right, Mr Carpenter?"

"All right?"

"You've gone so pale. If I were you, I'd go inside and sit down and have a nice cup of tea. It's the heat, when you aren't used to it, I've known visitors come all over . . ."

"I'm perfectly all right. Really I am, thank you. Thank you for telling me all you have. Look, if there should be a telephone call, a message of any kind . . ."

"From Mrs Lessing?"

"Yes. If she calls, tell her I'm still here and I'll be in

and out of the hotel during the day; she need only leave a number and I'll ring her back. Will you do that?"

"Of course I will, Mr Carpenter. And what if *Mr Lessing* should come? Any message for *him*?"

I could see that she was enjoying herself. "Of course. Tell him that I have to leave soon and wanted to say good-bye to his wife and I find she's lit out, with him not here and for God knows what reason. With him away I feel responsible for her and I'd like him to get in touch with me at once."

"Yes, Mr Carpenter. Of course. Don't worry, I'm sure everything will be all right." I think she was disappointed that I had a message for Lessing; I suppose the staff have a pretty good idea what goes on in the hotels they work in. It didn't matter, so long as they kept it for their own enjoyment.

I went down the steps and across the patio and turned right into the road and round the corner of the hotel, just to be sure there was no yellow car at the side there with the others. There wasn't. I came back into the hotel and ran up the stairs and found the room that had been Jane's. Its door was open and a room-boy was putting clean sheets on one of the beds. I walked in and we said 'Jambo' to each other while I looked all around and opened the drawers and the cupboards and even delved into the wastepaper basket, thinking that she might possibly have written me a note and then in the hurry of departure forgotten to take it down to the office. But there wasn't a thing, only some pink face-tissues with lipstick on them, and some bits of cotton-wool and a couple of hairpins. Nothing else. Suddenly I thought: What if she'd sent a note to my room, and they'd pushed it under the door as they're inclined to do, and I didn't see it? I rushed along the passage and searched every inch of the floor but I drew another blank.

I thought that while I was there I might as well pack

my cases. There was a notice on the bathroom door saying that rooms had to be vacated before noon on the day of departure, otherwise an extra day would be charged for. I didn't want that. Packing took me only ten minutes; I left the cases, one on top of the other, near the door, and went down and told the talkative reception girl that she could have the room when she needed it, she'd only to send for the cases and keep them somewhere safe. This was just an excuse to go and talk to her, in case Jane might have telephoned during the last half-hour. I felt sure she *would* telephone; she must have gone off in such a tearing hurry that she didn't have time to write a note, but since then she'd have had time to slow down and she'd want to let me know where she was and why.

I went along to the garage where I'd had the Dodge serviced; they were agents for several other makes as well, including Fords. I knew that because it was painted all over their windows. The man I'd dealt with when I brought the Dodge in for its quota of grease came out from behind an immaculate new Ford as I almost ran into the showroom; he recognised me but he looked surprised at my obvious haste.

"Good morning, Mr Carpenter. What can we do for you?"

It had occurred to me that I could just possibly have been wrong about that car, last night. I'd seen it, all right, it was yellow, and a Ford, but I hadn't thought of looking at the number plate—probably wouldn't have been able to see it in the dark, anyway—or anything else, and it was just possible that there was in Dar-es-Salaam another car of the same make and colour which I'd taken for Lessing's.

"Tell me, do you know of any yellow Fords?"

"Yellow Fords?" He looked surprised. Then he recovered. "Bless you, you can get a Ford any damn colour you want. Look at this one now; I could get you one of these in yellow, or I could have this very car re-

THE YELLOW FORD

sprayed for you. It's this year's model, only done a couple of thousand and that's genuine, mind you, I know the man that . . ."

"Wait . . . you misunderstand me. I don't want to buy a car, I've got one. I just want you to tell me if you know of the existence of a yellow-coloured Ford."

"Oh, they exist, all right. Never doubt it. But not in Dar, I'll swear to that, nor anywhere near. It'd come to me for servicing, you see, so I'd know. Why'd you ask, if you don't want one?"

"It'd make a long story. Anyway, thanks."

I went round all the garages, asking the same question. None of them knew of any yellow Ford. I went back to the Pan Africa.

No, there wasn't any message, nobody had telephoned.

My shirt was sticking to me, and I felt awful; I hadn't stopped to think about it till now, but I'd felt it coming and now I wondered if I ought to get some aspirins, or drink whisky, or what. This was such a bad time to start being ill; the answer came suddenly, *beer*. As soon as I thought of it—well, I hadn't thought of it, I'd seen a bottle on someone's table, in the courtyard—I knew that this was what I needed. I went through into the bar and drank a whole big bottle of Coast Lager and at once I felt better.

On my way out, the reception girl beckoned to me and I hurried over to her counter. "I've got your luggage down here, Mr Carpenter."

I nodded at her, trying not to let the disappointment show. I'd thought, when she beckoned, that Jane had phoned during the time I was in the bar. I asked the girl, diffidently: "I suppose . . ."

"No, Mr Carpenter. No call yet."

If I'd waited ten minutes, I could have had lunch, but I wasn't hungry. While I'd been drinking that beer, an obvious course of action had suggested itself: to check all the other hotels. It might be pointless but at least there

was a chance, and it'd be better than doing nothing. This was what I'd been rushing out for, when the girl called me over.

I knew where one of the hotels was; I'd often passed it, and seen people drinking on its veranda. There were several of them doing that now, but at the desk nobody'd heard of Mr or Mrs Lessing. Never heard the name, they said; at least, not lately. And it was much the same at the next place I tried, a very dirty building where I went up in a lift past floors that smelt like Egyptian kitchens, and the cage stopped, suddenly, in an open space full of unhappy-looking people who were sitting in groups round filthy table-cloths, drinking soup. In one corner was a desk, with a huge, fat man behind it; when I asked him the question, all he did was to stare at me out of very small and intensely malicious eyes and move his great head slowly from side to side. I began to feel like a fly standing on a twig in front of chameleon; at any moment the tongue would come out. Knowing the pace of the lift, I didn't want to wait there until it came back for me, so I started running down the stairs. It was quite a long way and the stench on each floor was horrible. This was beginning to feel like a nightmare, crazy and pointless and unbelievable, and as I hurried along the street I knew that I was going to be ill. I wanted to be sick, I'd feel better after that; but there wasn't time, I had to hurry, and besides, who wants to be sick in public? I should have done it in that last hotel, on the stairs; nobody would have noticed.

To get to the next hotel I had to go back towards my own, to the corner and then turn up. But I got to that corner and I thought, I should have something to eat. It might make me feel better. A jug of ice-cold water, and something light, an omelette, for instance. I went back down the other road, to the Pan Africa, and the girl saved me the trouble of asking my usual question by shaking her head at me as soon as she saw me on the steps. She looked

at me then with an expression of alarm, and as I turned away she called: "Mr Carpenter!" I waved, vaguely, without looking back, and went on into the dining-room. I knew what she'd have asked me: was I sure I was all right.

I got the same looks in the dining-room. From all sides, guests and waiters stared at me as if I was some sort of freak. But after I'd been sitting down for a minute the room was more steady and I could see them clearly and individually, and I stared back angrily at those who were still watching me, until they looked away. I drank a lot of iced water, and ate some grilled fish that was served in a rather pleasant sauce, and then they brought me a lamb chop but I couldn't finish it. I emptied the rest of the water into my glass and drank it all and then I got up quickly but rather clumsily so that the chair fell over, and ran out of the dining-room and across the courtyard into the men's lavatory. After I'd been sick, things got clearer again and I felt better. But it was only a momentary relief; the sickness welled up in me as I came out of the lavatory. There was a pain in my head, too, and a peculiar aching all over me. I stopped at the reception desk and leant all my weight on it.

"I suppose . . ."

"No, Mr Carpenter, I'm afraid not. But I do think you . . ."

"Look." Suddenly I knew I couldn't go to those other hotels. I'd collapse in the road, or walk into a car; I felt so weak that just having to talk made me angry. "Look, is there a room I can lie down in for an hour or two? I'll use the car tonight, but just for now if you can . . ."

"We can manage that, Mr Carpenter. Number thirty-seven. There's been some mix-up and it's likely to be vacant, if you want one more night, I think I could . . ."

"No. No, please." If only she'd stop talking! "Just for now. Can I go up?"

"Of course. I wanted to suggest it earlier, but you didn't stop to listen. I've some aspirin if you'd . . ." I shook my head and said, "*Please*", and held out my hand for the key, and she handed it to me and began to tell me where the room was, but I knew that; it was next-door to the one that Jane had. It had the same arrangements, too, thank heavens; I mean it had a private bathroom for me to be sick in. I remember doing that and then going out on to the balcony and lying down on the couch—because it was cooler out there and I didn't want to mess the bed up, when it wasn't my room—and almost immediately having to go into the bathroom again. Then I was back on the couch, completely exhausted but not sick any more, only sleepy; there was blissful surrender in this act of lying down, in relaxing completely and letting my mind wander and lose itself in all sorts of silly, inconsequential and even happy thoughts.

A voice woke me. I lay there with my eyes closed after I first heard it, because it was a voice I knew, and I thought it must have been part of some dream still echoing in my ears as I woke. But it spoke again.

"Poor fellow! Fever, eh?"

I opened my eyes and Lessing's pale ones stared nakedly into them. With none of the sympathy his voice had held; just plain, cold dislike, and perhaps a touch of pleasure. I twisted my head round, and saw that the other man on the balcony was tall and bald with a protuberant belly; I'd seen him before in the hotel. When he saw that I was looking at him, he stepped forward.

"I'm the manager of this hotel, Mr Carpenter. My name is Blenkinsop. I'm extremely sorry that you're . . . er . . . unwell, I really am. My receptionist tells me that you were intending to spend the night in your car, but I do think, in your . . . that is, with fever . . ."

I sat up, swinging my legs off the couch so that Lessing

had to step back quickly. "I'm all right now. I only needed rest. Thanks, all the same."

The manager smiled. "But you see, Mr Carpenter, that isn't necessary. Mr Lessing, who has booked this room for himself, has offered to allow you the use of the spare bed. I do think, Mr Carpenter, that you'd be . . ."

"I'll sleep in my car. As you're probably aware, Mr Lessing and I know each other."

Lessing's head jerked on its short, white neck, almost as if I'd hit him! Blenkinsop edged away. He wore the uniform of the post-war settler on the East African coast: white shorts and shirt, white stockings and black shoes—like a naval Petty Officer, only without the cap. It was time he changed to long trousers, anyway; I'm not referring to his age, only to the fact that the sun was down and that he had the honour of the Pan Africa to uphold. He left now, rather quickly, muttering something about my recovery.

I looked at Lessing. He'd turned away, and was lighting a cigarette. I asked him: "Where's Jane?"

"Jane?" The fat neck creased as he turned his head. "I take it you refer to my wife?" I didn't answer him, and after a moment he smiled. Well, I can only describe it as a smile; the lips curved, but the eyes still hated. "We've a great deal to talk over, Carpenter. But I would prefer to do it in comfort. I have reserved a table for us at the Palm Breeze, a little way outside the town."

I stood up, and nearly sat down again; my legs were weak and the sudden movement had set my head spinning. Two Lessings watched me; I headed for the gap between them and hit something that felt like the heavy punching-bag in a gymnasium. It sent me staggering; I clutched the top of the balcony wall and bent over it, waiting for my breath to come back and my head to slow its spin. Lessing's voice said: "Don't be silly, Carpenter. You are not in a condition to throw your weight about."

“Help me into the bathroom.” I suppose it was my voice, but it hardly sounded like it. The two Lessings came towards me and when they were close they fused into one and it took my arm. I leant against him and I think it was the sheer revulsion of that contact which gave me strength; I jerked my arm free and pushed him aside, and a minute later I was lying across the edge of the bath with my head under the cold tap.

TED'S STORY-XIII

LESSING EXPELLED HIS BREATH in a soft hiss as he set his glass down. "That is better already. A nice little place, this, don't you think?"

I'd just taken a sip of my neat brandy, and while it burned its way down my throat I waited to find out whether it was going to start me being sick again, or whether it was going to do me good. I felt as weak as a kitten and I couldn't keep my hands from shaking. We were sitting on the wall-seat that Jane and I had sat on, two nights ago. The only reason that I'd agreed to come was that Lessing had refused to discuss Jane's whereabouts until we got here. He'd driven me over, in his yellow car, I'd sat in Jane's seat and . . .

"Are we not on speaking terms, Carpenter?"

The brandy seemed to have gone down very well. I took another sip of it. "There's only one thing I want to talk to you about: Jane. Where is she?"

Lessing smiled. "You know, Carpenter, you have what they call 'a nerve' . . . A moment, please." He turned and flicked his fingers at the waiter. The man came up to us, showing clearly by the surly expression on his face that he didn't like to have people call him in that way. Lessing told him, curtly: "I want a cigar. Show me what you have." The waiter went to the little bar in the corner and spoke to the Indian behind it; he came back with two or three boxes of cigars on his tray and Lessing looked them over carefully and selected a heavy-looking Havana. He paid with a pound note and let the waiter keep the change.

"You ask me, Carpenter, where is my wife." He'd removed the band, carefully, and now he'd taken a little silver piercer out of some inside pocket. Suddenly he glanced at me sideways. "I really must apologise! Would you like a cigar?" I shook my head and he nodded. "I thought you were hardly well enough. How do you find the brandy?"

"All right so far. I was asking you about your wife."

"Exactly. Carpenter, do you think you have some *right* to do that? Some justifiable personal interest with which I would sympathise?"

"Jane vanished. She left after a telephone call, in a car with an Asian driver. I saw her the evening before and she was waiting for you, she'd certainly no intention . . ."

"You *saw* her, you say. You put it so nicely, Carpenter." The fingers of his soft, white hand held a match delicately to the end of the Havana; at the other end of it, his lips pursed pinkly as he drew at the flame. He dropped the match on the table and sent a cloud of blue smoke drifting up towards the geckos on the other wall. "Your expressions, Carpenter, are more refined than your behaviour." I'd finished my brandy; he snapped his fingers, and this time the waiter smiled; the tips made up for the insults.

"You say you *saw* my wife. In fact, you entertained her in your room. In the same manner that you entertained her, or perhaps I should say entertained yourself, many times during the period of my absence. Please don't bother to deny it. My information is entirely reliable; I have friends on this coast, even though I have never visited it before. And the Pan Africa, like all good hotels in hot climates, was built for comfort, for coönness, rather than for privacy. The open slats in and above the doors of the room, for instance. It would, I assure you, be a waste of time for you to deny it."

I drank a little of the new brandy. It really was doing

me good; my hands were almost steady. I put the glass down and asked Lessing: "What made you pick on Jane? To marry her? You might have known she'd be too good for you. You've a complex, the complex of the inadequate husband. You get it out of the drains of your system by insulting her. You may even believe what you're saying; if your informants are well enough paid, I dare say they'd like to give value for money. But all you're doing, Lessing, is writing filthy words on a nice, clean wall." I finished the brandy. "Do you draw pictures on the doors of lavatories, too?"

He finished his own drink and called for two more. What I'd said hadn't even ruffled him.

"Carpenter, I was born in Marseilles. My mother was a German and I couldn't tell you who my father was. I must have had one, because in those days they had not discovered the trick of artificial insemination. One of the reasons that I have been successful in life is that I have always seen things exactly as they are. While I am fascinated by your old-school-tie ability to call a shovel a teaspoon and even to make it that in your own mind, I do not envy or admire the habit. I see facts; in this particular case I know them to be facts, and I know that *you* know that I know. Your insults do not affect me in any way; nor are they likely to help you. So let us come straight to the point. Jane is . . . out of your way. You will not see her again, Carpenter. Neither here nor in Johannesburg nor in Cape Town. *Nowhere* will you see her again, do you understand me?"

Through a haze I was vaguely aware that he was ordering another drink for me. His own was hardly touched, but I'd begun to feel ill again and I was sure this brandy was good for whatever I had, so I didn't protest.

"If there was anything in your accusations, which there isn't, shouldn't I be the target for you? Rather than Jane?"

He chuckled. The waiter came and went, and I picked up the glass. "Why take it out on her?"

"Carpenter, I am, as you put it, 'taking it out' on you. Do you imagine for a moment that my wife needs you? Or will even miss you? But you'll miss her, you poor misguided cretin, because you are in love with her. Oh yes, I am well informed, Carpenter . . ." He leant over towards me, as if he was going to tell me something funny and he didn't want everyone else to hear it. "You don't think, do you, that you are the first of your type that I have had to deal with, with Jane? Eh?" He sat back again, smiling at me over his cigar. The smell of it made me feel sick; I drank more brandy to drown the nausea.

"You're determined to insult her. I was right, Lessing, I wasn't just talking; you're a case for a psychiatrist, or perhaps for just a simple doctor with a sharp knife . . . You aren't normal, are you?"

His face came and went and blurred and cleared. But he seemed to be sitting still. It was rather confusing.

"Where is she, Lessing?" I wished my voice didn't sound so thick. I raised the glass again, but it was empty. Lessing snapped his fingers. "You'll have to tell me, you know."

"I have to?" His face was clear to me for a moment and it was smiling. Then he looked away and watched the waiter coming back to us from the bar. When he'd paid, he asked me: "Why do I have to?"

I managed to get the glass to my lips without spilling more than a drop or two. It was a very important drink, this one, it had to help me to see properly and talk and think clearly; I placed a great deal of reliance on it and I drank it quickly like medicine. For a moment or two, it worked.

"Because if you don't, and if you harm her in any way at all, I'm going to the police."

"But I have already done that. I have reported that she

left her hotel and that I do not know her whereabouts. I mentioned that there had been previous occasions when . . .”—he paused—“but I must not anger you, must I? You, who like to avoid facts when they are not to your fancy. . . . I have been to the police, Carpenter. And to give them the complete picture—as complete, you understand, as was necessary for the purpose—I was obliged to give them your name, simply as an example of the sort of thing they should be looking for. I was not in any way suggesting that you were implicated in this new . . . escapade . . . of hers.” Lessing sniggered, and went on: “I am quite satisfied on that score; your behaviour today has convinced me. In fact, I told the police as much. You know, Carpenter, I am not a drinking man, but I think I must have something to sip while you are telling me what you will say to my friends at the police station.” He tapped an inch and a half of ash off the end of his cigar. “Waiter . . .”

I was glad of the chance to pull myself together. I closed my eyes and tried to tell myself that I wasn't sick; all I had to do was get control of my jumping nerves. I heard the waiter setting the glasses down on the table, and the clink of Lessing's money, and then his voice.

“I am so sorry, Carpenter, that this . . . upheaval . . . should have come at a time when you are hardly . . . to use a word you are fond of . . . normal. It puts you at a disadvantage, I fear. . . . But now, tell me. What will you say to the police?”

I opened my eyes and I didn't touch the brandy. Just for a moment everything was clear. I knew there was something wrong, something I hadn't reckoned on that was going to beat my ace. But it was the only card in my hand and I had to play it.

“I'll tell them about African Road Haulage. About the cargo it sometimes carries—the kind that one of your vans loaded in the bush near Rumpi, Lessing, that night you were studying the fauna . . .”

His eyes were wide with surprise. Not with shock, or alarm, but just plain surprise. "You saw? How? Did you follow me that night?"

"Yes. I followed you, and I saw."

"Then you really are a fool, Carpenter!" His voice sounded quite different, suddenly; it was hard, almost pithy. I was hearing the man's voice for the first time while waves of sickness swept up and I beat them off one by one but they never stopped, they came on exactly like proper waves, sea waves, remorselessly, one after the other: drowning must be like this. "If you knew that, then—oh, you're much more of a fool than I ever thought!" His hand rested on my knee. "Do you think you could do anything now? You could have, a few days ago; I'd have been in your hands! Listen. Listen carefully, fool. You're drunk, but try to understand me. You couldn't take your story to anyone now. Try to, if you like; go along and tell them! But wait." His voice dropped. "Do you still ask me where that little bitch is? Eh? D'you think the sea air will suit her, Carpenter? Do you think the Arabs will have ways to please her? Or she them? The crew of the *batili*——"

I had the glass of brandy in my hand and I tried to hit him with it. The table went over and I felt myself falling; I rolled over the table and it toppled sideways across me. There were feet running and chairs scraping and a lot of voices shouting and the light was vivid-white in my eyes and I heard Lessing's voice in its smoothest tone: "He's an alcoholic. I tried to stop him, I'm extremely sorry, I'd no idea how bad he was or I'd have got him out before this. Look, I'll pay for the damage, I'm really very sorry, it's most embarrassing . . ."

I was on the floor and I was being sick. I heard, from a distance, exclamations of disgust, and a woman's voice that shrieked: "Oh, what a filthy brute! I'll never come here again, never . . ."

THE YELLOW FORD

It was like listening to a play on the radio. It had nothing to do with me. I didn't even know what it was all about.

I pieced it together next morning, when I woke up in one of the beds of Lessing's room in the Pan Africa. It was daylight and there was a cup of tea on the bedside table; it was stone-cold but I drank it down because my throat felt as if it was full of brick-dust and tasted much worse than that. I'd a splitting headache and my whole face hurt; the eyes felt like putty, bruised and half-closed, and they wouldn't open when I tried to force them; my mouth hurt badly when I tried to move my lips. There was blood on the pillow and the top of the sheet. I wasn't sick, though, and it seemed the fever had gone altogether; I was suffering from hangover, and a somehow-injured face. I got out of bed and went to look in the bathroom mirror and what I saw was shocking. Both of my eyes were a mauvish blue and puffy, half-closed; my mouth was all torn and caked with blood and there was a split an inch long in the lower lip.

So now I knew the whole of the story. Lessing had brought me back here, unconscious or semi-conscious, and no doubt he'd given anyone downstairs the impression that his actions were those of a Good Samaritan; but when he'd got me up here with the door shut, he'd worked my face over with his fists. I felt, at this time, more surprise than anything else: first because I couldn't understand how anyone, even a creature like Lessing, could obtain any sort of satisfaction from beating up an unconscious man, and second because I wouldn't have thought his fists were hard enough to do this much damage. I went back into the other room and saw at once where he'd done it; the cushions of the armchair were on the floor and the chair itself was stained with blood.

I cleaned myself up as well as I could with soap and

water and the hotel towel, and went downstairs. The manager, Blenkinsop, was at the desk, and so was the girl. She gasped when she saw my face and Blenkinsop turned pale. I cut short the questions and the concern.

"Has Lessing gone? He hasn't used the other bed. Has he left?"

The girl took her hand away from her mouth. "Yes, Mr Carpenter." Her eyes were still fixed on my face and dilated with shock. "He checked out last night, after he brought you back. He said that you were . . . that you'd had too much to drink and that he . . . wanted no more to do with you."

"D'you know where he went? Where I can find him?"

The girl shook her head. "No, I'm . . ." Blenkinsop chipped in. "Mr Carpenter, I may be able to help you. But first, may I ask you to . . . how . . . that is, to explain . . ."

"All right. I was sick, as you know. He took me out on a pretext and fed me neat brandy fast. I was dizzy and I didn't know what I was doing, but I thought the brandy was doing me good, killing the fever. Well, it has. All I've got now is a hangover . . . and *this*." I put one hand up to my face but I was careful not to touch it. "I suppose I *was* drunk. And ill too. He did this to me upstairs; he sat me up in an armchair and took his time over it. Then he put me to bed. There's blood on the chair and on the bedclothes. I can't tell you *why* he did it; it's a personal matter and you don't need to know about it. Now . . . where did he go?"

Blenkinsop looked as if he believed me. He looked angry, too. "This must be in confidence, Mr Carpenter. In my position . . ."

"I understand that."

The manager swallowed. "Mr Lessing sent a telegram to Iringa, for a room."

So he'd gone south. "What time did he leave?"

"About eleven o'clock."

"I see. What do I owe you now?" I'd paid my earlier bill: it'd be just for this one night.

"Mr Lessing left ten pounds with us. He said he thought you might be short of money and that you might possibly need to stay over for another day."

"Nice of him. The change out of it will just about cover your cleaning costs. If it doesn't, you have my address. Thank you very much for your help."

"Please don't mention it, Mr Carpenter. I only hope . . ."

"Good-bye." I was on my way.

"Good . . . oh, Mr Carpenter!"

I stopped and looked back at them. "Yes?"

"Mr Lessing asked me, before he gave me the telegram, if he could rely on its being treated as confidential. I do hope that . . ."

"Of course." He had even less to worry about, there, than he thought. I ran to the Dodge and was glad that I'd put my luggage in it the day before. All I needed was a tank of petrol, and I got it at the filling station on the corner. The African attendant goggled at my face. "Bwana fight?" I made as if to smile, but it hurt and I stopped trying. I told him: "Big fight." He stared solemnly at me and asked: "Other Bwana bad too?" The tank was full and the cap back on. I told the boy: "Other Bwana going to die." His eyes glistened and he hissed sharply between his teeth as I let the clutch out and shot away in a shower of gravel. I'd meant exactly what I'd told him; there wasn't another thought in my head.

Except, of course, the means to the end. I mean, speed. Lessing had nine hours' start on me: but he'd be stopping at Iringa for food and presumably sleep, so I'd knock a few off the nine automatically. I had still to drive faster than him; I might have a puncture, or some other sort of delay, and lose even more on him. And I had to find him

somewhere this side of the Tanganyika-Nyasaland-Northern Rhodesia border, because if he got there ahead of me, after Tunduma I'd have no way of knowing which way he'd gone.

When I was clear of the town and environs of Dar-es-Salaam there was still a lot of traffic going the same way, cars and lorries and trucks and all flat out, but they didn't, I suppose, have quite my incentive to speed. I kept my foot down hard and I left them behind me like a snake slips its skin. I never slowed for the wide, blind screaming bends; I had Lessing's image in my mind and there was nothing between the two of us except distance. When the road straightened across the plain, the Dodge was doing ninety, not fast enough but the most I could get out of her. I thought of nothing, saw nothing, only the road ahead; whenever I saw anything on it I jammed my thumb down on the horn-ring and kept it there until the road was clear again.

Iringa came up early in the afternoon, in swimming heat. I hadn't known it was hot until I stopped outside the hotel. There was an African clerk on duty in the office and he stared at me and backed away as I put my hands on the counter and leant on it and asked him: "Is there a Mr Lessing here?"

"Lessing? You book?"

I'd an urge to shout but I made myself speak quietly. "Mr Lessing booked." I thought: I hope he did. If he didn't Blenkinsop was lying. I told the boy: "I am not Mr Lessing. I am looking for him. Is he here now?"

The clerk dragged his frightened eyes off my face and consulted the chart. Something must have clicked suddenly; he looked up and said: "Aoh, Mr Lessing! No, he leave, two hour, after lunch."

"Thank you." I was glad; it would have been difficult, in a hotel. Easier to find him on the open road, miles from anywhere, to overtake him and force him to stop. . . . I

broke whatever traffic regulations they have in Iringa, and I was out the other side with the needle in the speedometer still creeping up, and thinking: Two hours. I may not get to him before he stops at Mbeya. It may have to be in a hotel, after all. I hadn't thought of how I'd do it. All I knew was that this would be the most natural and proper thing I'd ever done—like killing a snake; there'd been one in the middle of the road, a mile back, writhing in agony where a car must have hit it. Perhaps Lessing's car; the snake might even outlive the man who'd killed it.

But thinking about how I'd do it, there was only one answer. With my hands. And as soon as I set eyes on him, even if he was in a crowd. There'd be no difficulty; they'd trained me in what they called 'Unarmed Combat', years ago, and the most vicious things are always those you remember. I didn't have any ideas about making him suffer; I just wanted him to know who it was that was about to break his neck, and then do it. I didn't worry about anything beyond that point, either; it simply didn't matter.

I'd taken in six gallons of petrol at Morogoro and I'd topped the tank up again in Iringa, and normally I'd have left it at that because there should have been enough to get me to Mbeya. But driving at top speed like this I wasn't at all certain of the Dodge's consumption, so at Sao Hill I stopped again and put in another three gallons.

After an hour's driving southwards from Sao Hill the road swung right, heading due west. This didn't make any difference at first, but the sun was dropping towards the horizon and after a while it was like driving into a great orange searchlight. There was no escaping it; it shone into my eyes not only directly but also in an equally brilliant reflection from the Dodge's bonnet. My eyes were hardly in a state for this sort of punishment, and I was more than glad when the sun went down over the rim of the hills. By the time I passed Chimala, it was dark,

and I had my lights on before I started the long, tortuous climb over the Baroto Mountains. This was one section of road that I really hated, and I'd always taken it slowly, well aware of the dangerously loose surface and the sheer drop from the unguarded, crumbling edge. The corners are all sharp and most of them are blind.

Normally I drive at seventy, and at any ordinary time I'd have dropped to thirty, or even less, for this mountain road. But I'd been doing a steady ninety all day, and now when I eased down to sixty it felt as if I was crawling. So I held it at sixty and went a little faster than that whenever there was a straightish section ahead. After all, driving's safer at night; on the blindest corner or rise you can see the loom of another car's lights long before that car would be in daylight view.

I was near the top of the escarpment, taking a sharp right-hand turn and hugging the right-hand side of the road, keeping, that is, close against the hillside, because on the outside of the bend there was only a void of darkness; the road inclined downward, here, over a shoulder of the hill, and as I straightened out of the bend I must have been travelling at something around seventy miles an hour. I came out of the turn and my headlights flooded the narrow track ahead and I saw a car stopped half-way along; it was pointing away from me, in the same direction as I was going, and it was parked on the left, on the very edge of the cliff.

There was a man standing in the road close to its right front wheel. It was Lessing, the dark shape of him was easily recognisable; he was standing with one arm up over his head in a signal to me to stop. I suppose he'd had a puncture and for some reason couldn't handle it on his own. I don't suppose it had occurred to him that I could have been so close behind him. I was supposed to be in Dar-es-Salaam, sick with fever and perhaps ashamed to show my face outside my bedroom.

I stayed on the right of the road and let the Dodge slow a little; he thought I was going to ignore his appeal and go on by; he waved more frantically and now I was close enough to see, in the brilliance of my lights at about twenty yards' distance, that his mouth was open in a shout. The sight of him, and the ease of it . . . well, damn it, this was going to look like an accident! It made me want to laugh—Lessing calling to me for help—it was really funny! But I didn't have time to laugh because I was judging the distance and the moment. It takes quite a minute or two to tell how it happened, but in fact it took only about five seconds from start to finish; I was driving fast, and I'd seen him at fairly close range.

I thought: *Now*. I pushed my foot down hard on the accelerator and swung the Dodge to the left, leaving him no space at all between the two cars; it was much too late for him to escape round the front. He'd realised now what I was doing and I like to think that in this moment he must have known who I was, if he had time to think. For a moment I had his face in my lights, convulsed with terror, and his mouth wide open in a scream of despair—no shout now, a scream; I couldn't hear it but I could *see* it. He flung himself against the bonnet of the Ford and tried to scramble up over it. It was much too late. My left headlight scooped him off the yellow car, crushing his legs against it and twisting him round; the top part of his body crashed down sideways across the bonnet of the Dodge and his head exploded against the windscreen in front of my face.

In my determination to give him no margin for escape, I'd come an inch or so too close. There was a terrible noise of metal tearing and the Dodge swung, locking somehow with the yellow Ford; I dragged my wheel over to the right and braked with every ounce of my strength, but it wasn't any good. At the last moment I let go of everything and tried to open the door, to throw myself out, but

TED'S STORY—XIII

I couldn't get it open; the car bucked and I flew up and hit the roof, then it began to roll to the left and at the same time the front of it went down steeply like the nose of a dive-bomber, and I, inside, was for some reason flying backwards. I think that at about this moment I must have got that crack on the head; at all events, it's as far as my memory goes.

EPILOGUE

BACK TO CARPENTER'S LETTER:

Well, that's it, Bill. You know the rest. If you do make it into a novel, and have it published, you'll see to it that the names are changed, won't you? I think that, for me, Carpenter might be a rather neat pseudonym. But it's all up to you, and I wish you luck. Oh, just one thing: if you do write it, would you do me a favour and call her Jane? Next to her own name it's about my favourite.

I've no worries about your publishing my account of how I killed Lessing. You see, it was officially written off as an accident, and as long as what you write is clearly fiction and you destroy the original—I mean, my own script—well, what the hell? Besides, if they did take it up, and then charge me, or whatever they do, they'd have to go into the whole of my story, all the part they rejected, the slave-running. They were so damn quick to disbelieve me and I'm darned if I can see why.

Which brings me to something else I ought to mention. This, really, may be nothing but some sort of hallucination, day-dream, what-have-you, but whatever the truth of it is, I must tell you. Ever since the accident I've had a dream that's so lifelike I can't help feeling it really happened to me. It's this: I'm lying on some hard surface in a cramped and uncomfortable position and I'm being jolted about. It's much as if I was on the floor of a car. It's pitch-dark and the only other thing apart from the jolting is Lessing's voice, and the words are always the same so I know them by heart.

"... see, fool, there can never be any evidence. Each time

EPILOGUE

the route and the methods are changed. No one man ever conducts it twice. The guards you saw, and the driver, are already out of the country and they won't come back. In a few years' time a new organisation will come into being for just one operation and it'll be the same then. An extremely profitable business . . ."

The voice starts in mid-stride like a gramophone record that starts half-way through, and it cuts off dead on that word, 'business'. You'll see my point: it could have been Lessing talking to me on the way from the Palm Breeze to the Pan Africa. But so far as I know, I was unconscious, I've no recollection of the drive.

Anyway, change the names, Bill, all of them. I'll keep an eye out for it—if they have English books where I'm going. You see, I'm off to find Jane. If I find her, I'll bring her back, and perhaps one day we'll come and see you in your shack. She remembered you; did you notice that?

That was all. That, and under it the signature of the man I've called Ted Carpenter.

Glancing back over it, my eye was arrested by that short sentence, 'You know the rest.' I wondered: Do I? Isn't there something that I don't know, something I ought to find out if I'm going to write this as a novel?

I felt sure there was. I couldn't for the life of me have named it or put a finger on it, but there was some factor in the story, running right through it from start to finish, that was either absent, or unclear, or out of line—a little cog somewhere that wasn't turning with the rest.

Lessing was dead, and Ted and Jane were out of my reach; the only place I could nose in would be the police station in Mbeya, where they investigated the 'accident'. There was just a chance they'd know something that I didn't, and from that I might be able to get the lead I needed. You see, I'd virtually taken Ted's story to pieces, broken it up and analysed each of the parts; there were

plenty of little contradictions and obscurities, but in such a personal narrative one expects that, and none of these was what I was looking for. It wasn't a twist or confusion of incident that I wanted; it was something much bigger, something more in the nature of a full-scale distortion or even a lie, that kept the joints of the story from falling into place in my mind.

I'd been planning a holiday for about this time. I'd gone to work on Ted's screed straight from finishing a novel of my own, and I needed a break. I'd been thinking of getting a ship from Durban and spending a few weeks in Mauritius, but now I decided to drive up to Malindi, on the Kenya coast, for my holiday; on the way I'd stop at Mbeya and try to find the policeman who'd handled Carpenter's smash and (presumably) investigated his story.

I drove up over the same route that Carpenter took, and when it was possible I stopped in the same hotels. The day I got to Mbeya it was quite late, and the police station had shut as far as routine business was concerned; so I left it over to the morning, and spent the night in the hotel where Ted had arrived with Jane when Lessing was stuck out on the road with his smashed differential. I was half-frightened that they'd put me, by coincidence, in one of those two adjoining rooms: and I was glad when they gave me a different one.

I'd have had to report at the police station anyway, to get my passport stamped. An African sergeant took it from the desk to some inner office, and then reappeared and went on with his own work while I filled in a lot of apparently useless information on a form he'd given me. Then a young white officer came out of the back office and checked the form and asked me a few questions that weren't there in print, and when he was satisfied that I was a human being with normal habits and capable of supporting myself for the duration of my stay in East Africa he stamped the passport and handed it to me. "Thank you, Mr Swanson.

EPILOGUE

Are you going to write a book about us after your holiday?"

I was grateful for the opening. "No, but I *am* trying to fill in some details of one that's just about finished; and as a matter of fact I was rather hoping you'd be able to help me."

"Me?" The idea seemed to scare him. "But how could . . ."

"I've a close personal friend who had a bad smash on the escarpment on his way here from Iringa. His name's Carpenter."

"Went over the edge, eh?"

"Good Lord! Were you . . ."

He laughed. "Oh, no. I'm new here. But there's one every week, over the scarp. When was this?"

"In fifty-one. Nearly three years ago."

"Superintendent Jackson was here then. He's the only one who could help you. The files are confidential, of course, so I'm afraid I couldn't . . ."

"Of course not. But it was an Assistant Superintendent who handled the case. That's what A/SP means, isn't it?"

He nodded. "Superintendent Jackson's your man, sir. He was promoted a year ago, when he took over."

"Can I see him?"

"Sorry. He's on leave. The A/SP's in charge while he's away. You could see him, but I doubt . . ."

"Where's Jackson gone? Anywhere within reach?"

"Depends what your reach is, sir. He's taken his family to the coast."

My hopes rose again. I'd thought the worst—over-seas leave, England. "At Dar-es-Salaam?"

"Mombasa. He's at the Nyali Beach Hotel. D'you know where that is?"

Of course I did. And, what's more, it was on my way to Malindi. I thanked the Inspector—that was his rank—and before I drove on out of Mbeya I went to the Post

Office and sent a wire to Nyali asking them to reserve a room for me for two nights; I'd get there in three days, stopping one night at Iringa and the next at Tanga, on the coast.

And I made it, although the stretch from Iringa to Tanga was a hard slog and at the end of it the only hotel in Tanga that could put me up was the dirtiest and worst-run establishment I've ever spent a night in. All that night it rained hard and next day the coast road to Mombasa was a cross between a marsh and a river and my car hardly needed wheels because it covered most of the distance in the manner of a barely-controlled sledge; but I didn't mind because I was so glad to have got out of Tanga. And when I arrived at Nyali in brilliant sunshine and found they'd had my telegram and were able to give me a room with a bath, I loved the place so much that I wished I hadn't booked for my holiday at Malindi. I'd spent a holiday here, at Nyali Beach, once before; it was only that I'd heard a lot about Malindi and wanted to see what the place was like.

After I'd cleaned myself up and had tea in my room while I was doing it, I went down to the desk and asked them where I could find Superintendent Jackson. The receptionist telephoned his room and he was there, and she told him that there was a 'gentleman' asking for him. She put the telephone back and told me that he was coming down.

Jackson was a tall man, strongly built; he was balding in front but I guessed he was of about my own age. He was wearing khaki shorts and a white sweat-shirt and from the mahogany colour of his skin it was obvious that he was spending most of his holiday on the beach. It's a splendid one; you're on it as soon as you cross the garden in front of the hotel; it's made of fine, white sand and the swimming's as good as any in the world.

"Don't know what you want to talk about, but we might

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as well do it a bit closer to the bar, eh?" That, I thought, was an excellent start. But as we sat ourselves down on either side of one of the tables outside the french doors, he went one better. "Swanson, you said your name was? It's familiar, but I don't know your face. What's your first name?"

"Bill. Well, William."

"You aren't the chap that writes books, are you?"

I admitted it, disguising my delight at the recognition, and from that I went on to tell him of my interest in Ted Carpenter. A waiter came along and I ordered two beers. Jackson sat quite still with his long legs stuck out in front of him, staring down across the garden while I told him what I knew, and how, and why I wanted to know more.

"You'd write this as a novel, eh? No attempt to tell the truth?"

"As a novel. In fact, it'll be so fictitious that I'm going to have Carpenter deliberately kill Lessing. I mean, in my book, it'll be murder and no accident."

The policeman glanced at me sideways. "It *could* have been, Swanson. You know, you're a lucky blighter; your job's a lot easier than mine. You just write a thing down the way you want it; you don't have to ruddy well *prove* it!" The beer came, and I signed the chit and gave the waiter thirty cents. Jackson murmured: "It doesn't matter now, anyway." He was looking away again, at the line of palms at the bottom of the garden, where the beach began. "But in that case, since you can write anything you damn well like, why come to me for facts?"

"Because truth's often a lot stranger than fiction, sometimes more dramatic, and always more convincing."

He nodded, slowly. "You're probably right. Yes, I see . . . but look here, Swanson, if I *can* help you—and mind you, for the moment I don't know that I can—I mustn't be involved in any way. No acknowledging my help, or any nonsense of that sort, eh?"

"Of course."

" 'M. How long are you here for? "

"I don't quite know. It depends on whether they can still keep me after the two days I'm booked for." While I'd been sitting there I'd come to a decision: if they could put me up for a couple of weeks, even if it meant changing rooms once or twice, why on earth should I bother to drive on another eighty miles to a place I mightn't like when I got there?

He nodded. "Well, before we talk about this, I want to think it over. It's some while ago now, and I'll have to get it straightened out; don't want to put you on a wrong track. So I tell you what, you join us this evening, for dinner and this dance they're having, and some time or other we'll find time for a chat. That suit you?"

"Very well. Thank you . . ."

"No. Matter of fact, you'll come in handy. Make up the party, I mean. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not, I'm delighted!" I'd no idea what this 'party' was that I was going to 'make up', but whatever form it took it would make a pleasant change from sitting in hotels on one's own, which was how I'd spent most of the last week. Until Jackson had mentioned the dance, I'd forgotten that they always had one here on Saturdays. It's one of Mombasa's social occasions; they do it outside, on the circular, composition dance-floor just below where I was sitting with Jackson.

Suddenly he chuckled. "Well, well. So I've got to start thinking about poor Carpenter again. I must say, I'd thought he was off my mind for good!"

"Was he ever on it? I mean, seriously?"

"Certainly he was. On my conscience very heavily indeed. In fact—look, I know this may be rather a shocking thing to say—it was almost a relief to me when he bought it."

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"I . . . I don't think I understand. *Bought it?* Ted Carpenter?"

Jackson stared hard at me. "D'you mean you didn't know?"

"*Carpenter's dead?*"

The policeman blew out his cheeks despairingly. "Oh, Gawd! We'd better have another beer while I tell you. Here, *boy!* You know he had this ridiculous bee in his bonnet about the girl. *You* know, that she was in some harem or something in the Middle East and that he was going to find her and bring her back. Lot of rubbish, but I couldn't tell him why. Wished I could have! What I did say to him was: 'If she *is* there, and been there a couple of years or whatever you say it is, well, by now she won't be worth rescuing.' D'you know, when I said that, he tried to hit me? Queer chap, supersensitive. This, I may say, took place in my office when he came to see me and said he was on his way to the coast hereabouts to get a passage in a dhow. I tried to talk him out of it. I told him: 'They'll give you nothing but dates to eat, and the drinking water will be covered in scum and full of bugs, you'll be half killed by lice and when you want to go to the lavatory (which'll be often, because you'll have dysentery before you're out of sight of land) you'll have to stick your bum over the side and you'll get it full of splinters.'

"None of that upset him in the least. So then I said: 'Look here, my lad. You were a Chindit, and you know something about bushcraft and you ought to be able to shoot straight. Up north of here they can use chaps like you at the moment. Why not go up there and do something useful?'

"Yes, I talked him into that. Sent him up with an introduction to a friend of mine, and I heard soon after he was doing very well. Then he went and got himself shot. They'd surrounded a village near Kiambu, in the hope of pinching a horrible swine who called himself General

something-or-other, and the whole operation went off smoothly and they got this bugger and that was that. Carpenter'd put a double perimeter of askaris round the village and one of the sentries in the outer ring had gone to sleep in a ditch, with his feet up on the nearside bank and his Sten in his lap. Well, when it was all over, Carpenter was groping his way out, taking a short cut back to the road where he'd left his truck, and he trod on one of this chap's legs. The idiot woke up scared out of his wits and let rip with the Sten and that was the end of your pal." Jackson picked up his beer and stared thoughtfully at me. "Fancy you not knowing."

I met him again at seven-thirty and envied him his cool-looking white dinner-jacket. My black one, built for London rather than for the tropics, was going to be hot. He grinned at me, and said: "The girls'll be down in half-a-minute; which, in English, means half an hour if we're lucky. Let's have a spot while we're waiting, shall we?"

We went into the bar and both drank whisky. I asked him: "You said 'the girls'. Would you clarify that?"

"Didn't I tell you? I'm so sorry. My wife and daughter, that's all. Makes four, you see. That's why I was so glad to have you drop in our laps like this. We've been here nearly a week and Sarah hasn't found one young man to her liking. And you see, Swanson, if the three of us were to sit on our own, I mean me and the two of them, well, every minute some young bounder'd be coming up and breathing gin all over us and asking if he can dance with my daughter. And you can't be rude to *all* of 'em . . . But you're about the right weight for the girl, I should say."

I looked at him. "Has it occurred to you that I'm about your own age?"

He seemed surprised. "Eh? Can't say I'd given it a

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thought. But . . .”—he was examining my face, now—
“Rubbish. I’d say you were . . . thirty-two?”

“Thirty-six.”

“ ‘M. Well, I passed that mark all of ten years ago. Here, come on, let’s have a drink.’ ”

“We’ve a long evening ahead of us, haven’t we?” I still had most of that first drink in my glass.

“Exactly. And we’ve got to dance. You any good at it?”

“No.”

“Nor ’m I. Boy! Two whiskies.”

I’d filled mine up to the brim with soda because I’m really not a strong drinker, and I was only half-way through it when there was a banging on the window behind us. I turned and saw a rather pretty girl with dark hair and bare shoulders; she smiled at me when I turned, but it was Jackson she wanted. I told him, and he said: “Oh, they’re down. Pretty good going.”

“Is that your daughter?”

“Yes. Come on.”

By the time we went in to dinner I was completely at home with the Jackson family. His wife was a pleasant woman with a Roman nose and a quick sense of humour, and Sarah was gay and attractive and she managed, somehow, to be very young without being very silly. She couldn’t have been more than eighteen.

After dinner, Jackson and I had a few moments to ourselves. We’d eaten early, so that we’d be sure of getting a decent table outside for the dance; the place was always swamped with people on these occasions. Jackson asked me: “Swanson, do you like liqueurs?”

“No. As a matter of fact I don’t.”

“Nor do I. Boy—two whiskies!” He gave himself a cigarette. “Well, like her?”

“Who?”

“My daughter, damn it!”

“Sorry. Why, yes, she’s charming . . . and *most*

attractive . . . Look, will you answer me one question, now, about the Carpenter affair?"

"Go ahead."

"It's something you said that's been bothering me. You referred to Ted being under the impression that Jane was somewhere in the Middle East; and you said that was rubbish but you couldn't tell *him* so. Well, what makes you sure of it? How do you know she isn't in some sheik's harem?"

Jackson had signed the chit for the whisky. As he handed it to the waiter he looked up towards the front of the hotel. "Oh, here they come." His wife and daughter were just coming out through the french doors on to the terrace. Jackson said: "You know, Swanson, it's beginning to strike me that you don't know much about this Carpenter business . . . Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

"I know the girl isn't in the Middle East because she happens to be in Johannesburg. I put her on the train myself, as soon as she was able to travel."

I was staring at him and finding this extraordinary statement difficult to comprehend. He saw my expression and smiled, and we both stood up to greet the women. "Of course, since all your information came from Carpenter, you're as ignorant as he was." Jackson leant towards me and rested a hand on my shoulder. "My dear fellow, *Jane was in the yellow Ford, when Carpenter knocked it over the escarpment!*"

I was still standing there with my mouth open and my head going round in circles when I realised that the band had started to play and that it was time I did something about it; I asked Mrs Jackson if she'd like to dance. Her husband objected. "No, no. *I* want to dance with *her*. You take Sarah."

I'd thought at the first sight of her that Sarah was pretty. But she was more than pretty; she was an ex-

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tremely good-looking girl. She asked me, as we danced: "Do you like this dress, Bill?" I held her away from me, and had a look at it. It was white, and off the shoulder, and it suited her very well indeed.

"Yes, I do. It's perfect for you."

"You're nice . . . But you seem a bit dazed, or something. Is anything the matter?"

"Yes. Three things. One, your father drinks whisky faster than I'm used to it. Two, he's just made a statement which so far as I can see doesn't make any sort of sense. Three, I was driving up this way for a lonely, bachelor holiday and here I am dancing practically cheek to cheek with the most beautiful girl in East Africa."

She moved closer and put her cheek against mine. She said, in a voice like a purr: "Not *practically*. *Absolutely*."

I prised her off. "Now, look. This is all very well, but I'm exactly twice your age. You must . . ."

She was laughing. "You *can't* be!"

"I'm thirty-six, Sarah."

"Then you aren't twice my age. I'm very nearly nineteen. You're just seventeen years older than me; and what's seventeen years, for heaven's sake!" She made it sound like ten days.

"It's the difference between you and a new-born baby. That's all."

"That's not true. The first eighteen years are the important ones, not the next lot. I mean, I'm adult now, as adult as you are. I won't be any different in another eighteen years."

"Won't you, Sarah?"

"No, I won't." She'd closed in again, and I gave up the struggle. A few moments later we danced past our own table and the Jacksons were back there; as we passed, Sarah's mother gave me a long look of penetrating approval. It made me feel nervous.

The chance to talk about Carpenter again came about half an hour later, when the female Jacksons had gone inside.

"You see, Swanson, it was Carpenter himself who put it into Lessing's mind to give the impression that he'd done something awful to the girl. Carpenter had this slavery thing on his mind; that night he's supposed to have seen them being loaded into the van in Nyasaland he'd had a jolly good bellyful of Lessing's whisky, and for whole days before it he'd been planning to write a novel about the same thing. My view is that he dreamed, or imagined, the whole of it. But, anyway, the fact remains that Lessing's only object after he realised what had been going on in his absence, in Dar I mean, was to get Jane away from Carpenter; so he'd taken her away to another hotel—the one that Carpenter checked first, incidentally, but she'd booked in under another name. Then Lessing intended to give Carpenter a damn good fright and, if he could, a bit of a hiding, either to scare him off or to leave him in such a state that he wouldn't be able to follow them. It was Carpenter, you see, who mentioned the slave thing, and Lessing took it up and let him think that was what had happened to *her*. You follow me?"

"Up to a point. But why would Jane have gone along so easily with Lessing's plan? And not even have left a note for Carpenter?"

"She did leave a note, but Lessing found it before it got to Carpenter. In it she'd told Carpenter that he wasn't to worry, he must just carry on according to plan and everything'd work out. If he'd got that note, it would have saved a lot of trouble, wouldn't it? Would have saved Lessing his life, apart from anything else."

"I'm not sure *that* would have been such a good thing."

"I can see you believe this nonsensical slave-running yarn, Swanson. If I were you, I'd forget it."

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"There's one thing in Carpenter's letter to me that I think you ought to know about. I've got it here, upstairs; you can see it in the morning. But roughly, he said . . ." I told Jackson about the words of the recurring dream. I could see that it interested him. I shrugged: "But I don't see how it could be of any practical use to you."

He was looking thoughtful. "Oh, it could. It *could*. You see—this is in strict confidence, Swanson—if we got the South African police to check very carefully on every single contact and acquaintance Lessing ever had—and we had a list of these names at our immigration points—then if any one of those people happened to arrive for a holiday, or on business, we could keep a friendly eye on him, if you see what I mean . . . May I have that letter, Swanson?"

"You can have a copy of that part of it."

He stared at me. Then he smiled. "My dear chap, Carpenter's *dead*. I knew it was no accident, anyway. There was just no way of proving it was anything else; particularly when the girl insisted that the Dodge had skidded and that Carpenter couldn't possibly have avoided the crash. May I have it, please?"

"All right."

"I'm much obliged to you, Swanson."

"Tell me. Was Jane hurt?"

"Hardly at all. Just bruises and scratches and two ribs. She was lucky; the Ford stuck against a group of trees on a flat outcrop of rock just down from the edge. The Dodge went right on down to the bottom, and it's a mystery how Carpenter survived at all. If it hadn't been for her, mind you, he wouldn't have. She climbed down and got him out of the wreckage and tied up his head and that sort of thing; then she climbed all the way up to the road again and flagged a passing lorry. That's how we came to know of it, us and the ambulance people."

Mrs Jackson and Sarah came back and I danced with

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Mrs Jackson, and she told me how difficult it was to find 'Really Nice Young Men' in East Africa. I rather gathered that she was including me in this category, and I felt that I was sailing under false colours, but I didn't know quite what I could do about it. She said: "It's such a pity that you'll only be with us for a day or two. This is the first time I've seen Sarah enjoying herself since we arrived!"

"Actually, it's all arranged now. I mean, I'll be here a fortnight or so; they were uncertain about the room question, earlier on, because I'd only booked for two days . . ."

"But that's wonderful! Oh, I'm delighted, Mr Swanson! Let's go and tell Sarah . . ."

"You aren't trying to do me out of this dance, are you?" I thought that was rather good. So did Mrs Jackson; she giggled, and clutched me more tightly. But then she saw her husband dancing with Sarah, and she dragged me to them through the crowd rather as if I had a ring in my nose, and told them that I was staying for a fortnight and wasn't that absolutely divine, Sarah darling? Sarah seemed more surprised than pleased. Her father just nodded at me.

"It's going to be bad for the whisky, Swanson."

Then we went on dancing.

"Last orders, please. Bar closing." The waiter had addressed himself to Jackson but I butted in; it was my round. "Two whiskies, two sodas." The man went off. I said to the policeman: "There's still some explaining to do. One thing specially. What I don't . . ."

"You're going to be here a fortnight, aren't you? I'll have written the ruddy book for you by that time!"

"Let's hope so. But tell me: why did you send Jane down to Johannesburg, and neither of you ever let Carpenter know she'd been in the car? You even let him go on thinking she *could* be in some Arabian brothel . . ."

"Harem, please."

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"Harem, then. But why?"

He lit a cigarette. "Because that was what she wanted. She wanted it for the same reason that she'd been prepared to shoot off with Lessing from Dar-es-Salaam when he asked her to. Hide in another hotel . . . all that . . . and you see, there was no earthly reason for me to tell Carpenter that she'd been in the car. In point of fact, seeing what had transpired one way and another since he'd been in touch with her, it seemed to me there'd be less danger to all concerned if I fell in with what she wanted and let him think she was out of his reach. So I merely refrained from telling him what he didn't know. . . . Well, cheers!"

"Cheers! But what was *her* reason?"

Jackson put his glass down. "Good God, lad, you don't know *anything*, do you? All right. Tell me, now, haven't you wondered, as Carpenter did often enough, why a fine girl like that should have married such an awful bounder? Eh? A man twice her age . . ."

"Oh!" I had to laugh. Jackson scowled at me. Then he went on: "More than twice her age: a singularly unattractive individual with a dubious background . . ."

"And pots of money."

Jackson shook his head. "You're wrong if you think that of Jane. I saw a lot of her, in Mbeya, and so did my wife. That girl's got guts—courage—and, in her own way, a pretty high moral standard. I warn you, in a very short space of time you'll think I'm contradicting myself. But I'll swear to one thing: that girl wouldn't marry a man just for money."

"Then—what *did* she marry him for?"

Jackson sat back, blowing smoke out of his nostrils and smiling like a conjurer about to pull the rabbit out of the top hat. He said: "She didn't, Swanson. She didn't. He was the director of a company which employed her, and she was his private secretary. In Johannesburg. Lessing

was married, all right, but not to Jane. He left a widow—a fat, ugly female; I've seen her photograph—and three unattractive daughters. All very comfortably off."

For about a minute I just sat and let it sink in. Then I told Jackson: "I see your . . . contradiction. What about it, 'the high moral standard'?"

"Yes. Well, look at it this way. Have you ever . . . well, you know, had a girl, a mistress . . . and let her down? Eh? You only wanted her for that, although you felt you loved her at the time but for some reason you didn't want to marry her, or couldn't; something of that sort?"

"I suppose so."

"'M. And so've we all, Swanson. And once that's happened to a girl, well, damn it, she's *Jane*, isn't she? Once, twice, and a marriage that went wrong for some reason I know absolutely nothing about; and then, this fellow Carpenter lets her down with a bloody great thump . . . and, by God, she *loved* him, you know! D'you see what I mean, Swanson?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Good. Doesn't mean she'd marry a man for his money, does it?"

"No. I'm right with you this far. But why did it make her so anxious to fall in with Lessing's plans?" I'd seen a small glimmer of light, but I was being lazy; I wanted to be told.

"She loved Carpenter. Really, genuinely loved him. And she was absolutely determined he shouldn't know that she was just having an illicit holiday with Lessing. That was why she wanted Carpenter to shove off and come and find her later; *and* why she did what Lessing told her, about changing hotels in Dar. She was dreading any sort of scandal, the fuss in a hotel, the cheap look of it. She wanted to get back to Johannesburg, and either tell Carpenter about it in her own time and in retrospect, or let

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him go on thinking she'd been Lessing's wife. I told her, I remember: 'You couldn't possibly keep *that* up,' and she said yes, she'd have had to have told him eventually. What she hated was the idea of being . . . you know . . . 'caught in the act' . . ." Jackson drank some of his whisky. "That's all you're getting from me tonight, Swanson."

"It's all I need, thanks. I'm most grateful . . ."

"You've got more coming, by the looks of it." I followed the direction of his glance, and it was Sarah rejoining us. I stood up and pulled back her chair for her. But she didn't sit down.

"If you're going to sit there talking to my father any longer, I'm going to call you 'Uncle' Bill. This is the last dance just starting . . ."

I took her arm and led her into the crowd on the floor. She said: "Mummy's gone to bed." There was a lull in the conversation, then, while she moved in closer and laid her cheek against my jaw: "Bill, did you change your bookings before, or after, you met me?"

"Actually, before. But if I hadn't, and then I'd met you, I'd have done it like greased lightning."

"'M.'" She snuggled closer. I tried to keep my feet moving because, after all, she was exactly half my age, and, what's more, her father had his eye on us. Rather a bleary eye, now. Sarah murmured: "Daddy says you're looking for a story. Are you?"

"No. I've got it."

"The whole thing?"

"The lot."

"I'm so glad. You won't have to worry about it any more now. Will you come swimming with me tomorrow?"

"All day."

Down below there, at the far end of the garden, curving palm trees were in silhouette against the stars. It was very beautiful. I told Sarah: "You know, this is amazing. I'm

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absolutely hopeless at dancing, but with you, it seems so . . . *easy*."

The words weren't mine. I'd heard them, I thought, quite recently. I wondered, vaguely, where. Perhaps I'd read them somewhere. . . .

Jackson had gone to bed.

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